ries of Action Everywhere

# Everybody's

October
1928

UNIVERSITY OF I

A
uth Sea
ovelette
By
R. W.
XANDER

A
*Western*
*Novelette*
*By*
ANTHONY
M. RUD

## SONS *of* ALLAH

*A Tale of Moro Raiders*

BY ARED WHITE

WRIGLEY'S
SPEARMINT
THE PERFECT GUM
THE FLAVOR
LASTS
MINT LEAF FLAVOR

Wrigley's
has a soothing effect
—it steadies the nerves.
Handy refreshment—
good between smokes.

176

AFTER EVERY MEAL

October, 1928
Vol. LIX No. 4

# Everybody's

**WILLIAM CORCORAN**
*Editor*

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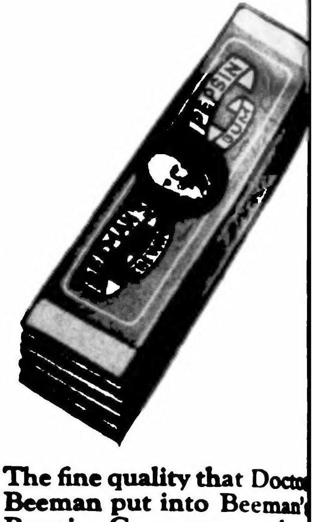

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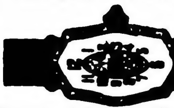

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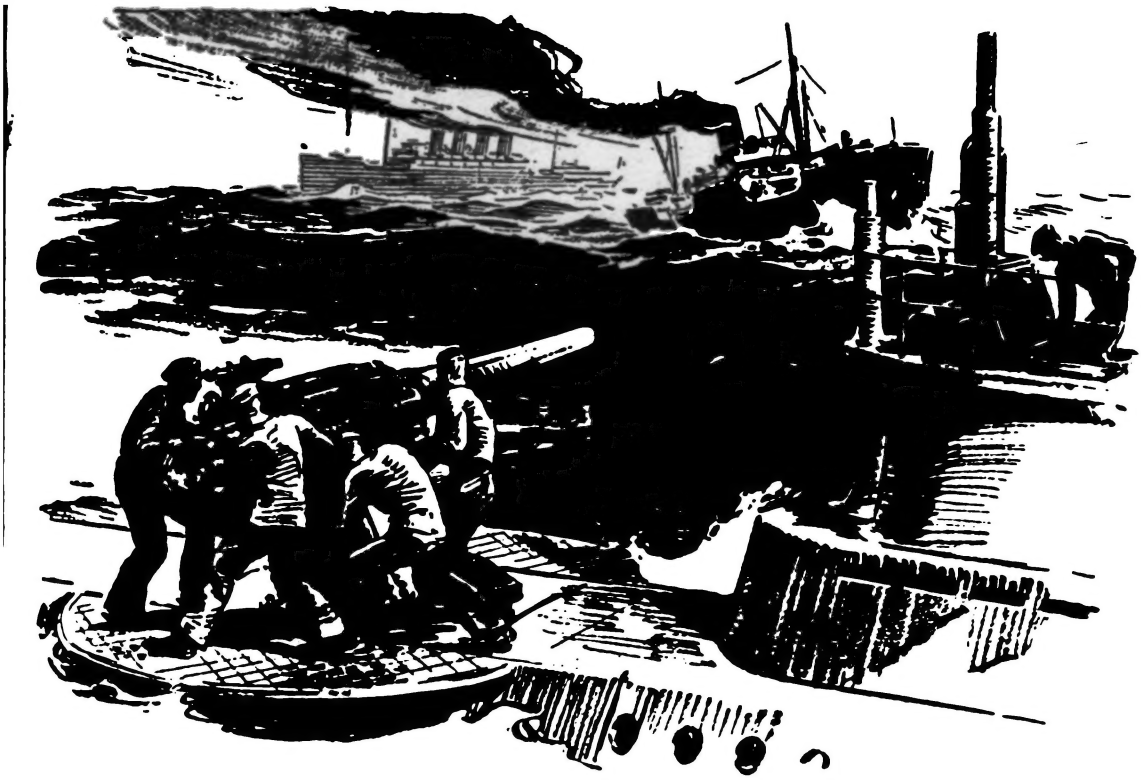


# *The* OUTCAST

## *A Lowly Ocean Tramp Ship and Her Hour of Pride*

### By BURKE BOYCE

THE French port authorities at Bordeaux knew what they were doing when they held the stumpy old freighter *Mozambique* inside the submarine nets at the mouth of the Garonne River. The *Mozambique* was ready for sea, with a cargo of gravel ballast which she was solemnly sworn to carry to Newport News, and her crew had primed themselves with cognac for the plunging rush into the war zone. But it did not seem good to the port authorities that the *Mozambique* should blunder out just then to set every U-boat in the vicinity on the alert.

This was not because they cared particularly about the freighter. Nobody cared about her. She was simply an eight thousand ton tramp steamer, flecked to a fever with rust and red-lead, and entirely unbeautiful. But they cared very much for the slim new passenger liner *Rochefort;* and the *Rochefort* was also scheduled to sail that day. It was better, therefore, that the lolloping freighter should not precede her past the nets like a noisy ragamuffin beating on a drum.

So the *Mozamique* swung at single anchor in the roadstead of the Garonne River, where she had slipped down on the afternoon tide from Bassens, and smudged a faint stream of smoke from her scaly funnel across the precision of the French landscape. She was too high in the poop and the forepeak, the white of her superstructure had aged to a dirty gray, and her bows were caked with the salt of every sea from Port Said to the Farraleones. Her anchor chain, braced against the swirling, tawny eddies of the river mouth, was heavy with dried ooze and rust, and she strained clumsily at it, much as an unwashed mongrel might strain at a leash.

From the low headlands on either side of the river a string of small floats stretched before her bow, and marked the line of the steel nets outside of which there was no more any certainty of life. A French gunboat rode near by, and a little farther on the two gilt service chevrons of the steam yacht *Corsair* shot their angles into the sun. A brown-sailed fishing sloop drifted in with the tide, and a pilot boat churned idly in mid-channel. Everywhere there was sunlight, and flowing yellow water, and the sleepy gleam of red roofs that climbed the hills along the shore.

Presently the *Rochefort* came slipping down the river, trim as a gull's wing, and swung to a dainty anchorage. She was not camouflaged, but rode in all the glory of her gleaming hull and red funnels, dominating the roadstead and towering her rakish masts above the two pitiful stumps that were used to swing the booms of the *Mozambique*. A few passengers lined her promenade deck to make vivid spots of color against the speckless white of her superstructure, and the twinkle of brass peeped here and there along her length. She was a lady—and an aristocrat.

The captain of the *Mozambique* said as much to his chief officer, fingering tarnished gold on his cuff sleeves.

"I know my ship isn't all it ought to be," he remarked with a trifle of bitterness in his tone. "She's old enough for the boneyard, and the spirit is about pounded out of her, to say nothing of the paint. But they might be a little considerate about throwing floating palaces in my face. I don't relish going out with her."

"I thought we would be waiting till tomorrow," said the mate.

"No. We're to go as part of her convoy," said the captain. "Although only the great wisdom of the port authority knows why. We've got no more than a three-inch gun on board. I suppose they figured we could keep alongside her and act as a torpedo buffer for her vital spots. It's like holding up a dead body in front of you to stop bullets, and in this case we're selected to be the dead body. I guess they must have taken a look at the *Mozambique* and picked her out unanimously."

The mate ran a thumb up and down the bridge of his nose reflectively.

"We can't keep up with her if she's going to use any speed, anyhow."

"Of course not. She'll pull away from us in the morning, after we get clear of the coast, and take the gunboat with her. And then we'll be ripe for picking by some *Unterseeboot* that's been hanging on the flank waiting for something to happen."

The mate pondered the matter for a moment.

"Then it's no use to have the bos'n finish that painting job on the forepeak," he said.

"It would be more to the point," agreed the captain, "if he ran his eye over the boats and falls. We may be martyrs to the cause of that gilded ferryboat over there, but there's no need of our having to swim if we can help it. I wish we were loaded with lumber. We'll go down like a pricked balloon the way we are now."

They lay there during the afternoon, the liner and the tramp freighter, and when the width of the harbor inside the nets had become a pool of turquoise set in bronze, the gunboat led them out. The liner went first, surging easily ahead with a welter of smoothly churned water in her wake, and the freighter followed, her thrashing propeller throwing spray against the dumpy overhang of her stern.

As they steamed along parallel to the extended spit of dun colored land that was the last finger of the coast of France, the *Mozambique* answered signals that called her close to the liner's side. She rode there at an awkward gait, dwarfed by the magnificence of spars and shrouds high above her, her few boats swung outboard and her squat bows nosing into the dreariness of the Bay of Biscay.

"We're put here to be sunk," said the captain, his eyes on the faintly visible head and shoulders of the seaman in the forward crow's-nest, "like some coal barge or a scummy knockabout of the seven seas. This takes the pride out of a man."

"There's the gunboat to pick us up," suggested the mate. He stooped in a corner of the bridge, and the quick flare of a match glowed across the set lines of his mouth. He cupped his hand close around the cigaret s he straightened himself. It was his tenth since leaving the harbor, and smoking above decks after sundown was forbidden, but the captain made no comment.

Instead he said:

"The gunboat's leaving at dawn."

There seemed nothing more to say, so the mate was silent. Then complete darkness came down, and the vessels were masses of blacker darkness that throbbed and beat together into the night. Only the muffled pounding of their screws, and the clear brittleness of their ship's bells showed that there was something more than an empty vastness on the face of the sea.

THE *Mozambique's* screw was not as muffled as it might have been. She was riding high with her light ballast cargo, and the blades flung up out of the water at each revolution, beating with a heavy and labored persistence. So that long before midnight the gunboat came slipping like a lean wraith from the other side of the liner, and hailed the bridge of the *Mozambique*.

"Better shift your cargo to the stern if you can, and sink your propeller. The *Rochefort* says she can hear you from her bridge, and you're too noisy."

The gunboat slipped away again in a long arc of phosphorescent foam, and the captain of the *Mozambique* turned to the officer on watch.

"We're making too much racket for the lady," he said. "Get out the shovels and have bos'n start the crew at Number One hatch. The *Rochefort* might have had the decency to let us die for her without bothering us."

After that the crew sweated blasphemously in a cavernous hold whose iron sides roared and bellowed hollowly as they blundered into the seas. Men came off watch on deck, and dropped into the lantern-lit murk where other men bent and lifted and bent again with glistening shoulders. It was like working in a vast catacomb that trailed off into shadow, and the dust from the gravel sifted in a still cloud above the lanterns. The only air came from the small manholes at each of the two forward hatches, and from these manholes dust from the gravel also sifted upward thinly. On deck it looked like the steaming of some diabolical cauldron, and in the hold it was a nightmare.

Eventually, however, it was done. And when the sun came to throw the shadows of the ships ahead of them on the water, the *Mozambique* was riding deep at the stern, her bow tilted upward like a badly-weighted rowboat. It was an absurd angle, and it added a touch of ridicule to the old freighter.

"She looks more like a performing elephant than a vessel," the captain remarked acidly. "I hope her ladyship is satisfied." He drove his ship closer to the liner and held her there, wallowing. In the clean morning light she looked dirtier and more disreputable than ever.

When the sun grew stronger and the streamers of mist were lifting from the sea, the gunboat put about with hoisted flags and laid the smoke over her back as she headed toward the coast. The crew of the *Mozambique* watched her go. When she had rounded over the top of the horizon they forgot her, and looked expectantly at the stately sides of the *Rochefort*. But that ship, for reasons best known to herself, showed no inclination to speed up. She kept her position alongside the freighter, and it began to be whispered that she was afraid.

The mate, coming to the bridge for his morning watch, opened a fresh pack of cigarets and reported as much to the captain, who snorted.

"Afraid? Of course she is. So are all of us—horribly afraid."

"Yes, sir," said the mate, grinning.

"I'm going below. I need sleep, and I'm tired of seeing these two ships in the same patch of ocean. The comparison is too obvious. This comes, Mister Nickerson, of not being a pious man."

He tramped from the bridge, and the mate was left alone with his pack of cigarets and the sea.

Or perhaps it would be better to say that the sea was left alone with the mate, for it was a sea full of silent possibilities. It stretched in a sparkling immensity of moving waves that reached to the rim of the world, and yet the sense of it weighed so heavily that it seemed to lay a hand on the very windpipes of those who looked at it, throttling the breath and fingering at the nerves. It was a sea where every patch of weed, every bit of flotsam, caused the heart to skip a beat. It was full of deceptive hollows and peaks that obstructed the straining watchfulness of eyes; and each miniature crest that broke over itself in a flurry of foam and bubbles might mask a line of larger bubbles that would break only against iron hulls. There was no peace and no relief anywhere. There was not even the satisfaction of actual certainties — like gas masks and bayonets, for instance, with the rattle of machine guns and the screaming comfort of a barrage being laid down overhead. Nothing but silence, and long clouds, and the knowledge of being utterly conspicuous in an inimical void.

THE two ships rode together over the morning ocean. The liner forged ahead easily on an even keel, cutting the water into two sharp plumes with her bow, and lining the crispness of her masts and funnels against the sky. Beside her the *Mozambique* wallowed slightly like the lumbering old hulk she was, and strained and rattled with the pound of her engines —a worthless tramp, full of smells and loose ends, and useful only as a target for torpedoes.

Then without warning there came a wordless shout.

The mate raised his eyes, and saw hunched shoulders leaning far out over the rail of the forward crow's-nest, a mouth that gaped without sound, and an arm that stretched, pointing. Below, on the deck, men had frozen into motionless stares, like figures in a wax-works factory.

The mate followed the direction of their eyes. A long stream of bubbles had appeared a few hundred yards from the starboard quarter of the ship, a stream of bubbles that grew in length with a horrible rapidity, and deviated neither to the right nor to the left. It was coming towards the ship at a slight angle, and while he stared it reached half its distance. Unconsciously his eye told him that there was a chance the bubbles might miss their mark and pass harmlessly astern. And with the realization, his hand shot up toward the whistle cord. He knew, listening to the five screaming blasts that tore against his ears, that if the bubbles had been coming straight for the ship he could never have moved. As it was, however, he shouted an order, and felt the vessel quiver and roll as the helm went over. Her stern swung heavily, leaving a smooth patch of water like ironed silk.

Then for a moment the silk was ripped in half as the line of bubbles hissed through it alongside the ship and disappeared harmlessly across the creaming wake of the *Rochefort*.

The wake reminded him, and he turned to look at the liner. She was quivering like a race-horse, and already her stern was drawing past the bow of the freighter. Figures raced along her decks, and black smoke poured from her funnels.

There came a voice at his elbow.

"I've still got a ship under me, I see. I didn't think the old girl had such a sidestep left in her."

"His aim was bad," said the mate. He leaned against the rail of the bridge, and forgot to light a cigaret. Bubbles were dancing in front of his brain.

"It won't be next time. George! The *Rochefort's* panicky, isn't she?"

The liner had swept ahead at full speed in a crazy zigzag, piling heavy waves of tumbled water behind her. Some of them rolled against the bow of the *Mozambique*, swinging her nose around and slapping at it in their haste. The old freighter danced a moment in bewilderment, and then retaliated with deep-plunged thrusts that lifted the spray over her decks and rattled her stumpy masts. Her engines, straining to their utmost, rumbled angrily inside her hull. But the *Rochefort* raced on, heeding nothing. She would be out of torpedo range in a few short minutes, and the *Mozambique* would be left alone to face the U-boat with her three-inch gun and her wallowing gait. Even now, as the port authorities back in Bordeaux had foreseen, sitting comfortably in their offices on dry land, she was a vastly easier target than the speeding liner. Her broad sides and high bow, with the brilliant flecking of red-lead along her hull, were a temptation to any submarine commander.

"This," said the captain grimly, "is where we come in. And while we're keeping Fritz interested, the *Rochefort* makes knots for safety. She might have given us a salute. We're doing our best."

"Why don't they sink us and have it over with?" said the mate, his voice high-pitched and strange. "Why do they make us wait?"

His fingers fumbled with the strings of his life-vest, and his nose was a pinched line of white in the paleness of his face. Both men stood with knees slightly flexed, feeling for the blind shock that was to hurl them to the deck and send them sprawling for the boats. Beneath their feet the *Mozambique* careened in a war dance, and trembled as she fought to muster together her ancient strength. From her fat and scaly funnel came billows of smoke black with unburned soot under forced draught, and around the squatness of her bows the water boiled away in two blunt lines of foam. There was no fright in her attempt at speed, rather a stolid determination to play out the game to the last staggering end, and to go down, if possible, with a little glory snatched back from the wreck of her youth and pride.

SO CERTAIN were those on board her that the blow would be but a matter of seconds, that they did not see the periscope until it was well out of water. Then someone shouted, and suddenly the thing became quite plain. It was on the starboard bow, nearly a quarter of a mile ahead; and as they watched, fascinated, it rose slowly from the nothingness of the sea. The little wave that rode in front of it grew larger, the conning tower broke the surface of the water, and at last the whole length of the U-boat swam into view, an eyeless monster from whose top and sides the water slid in glistening gray-green silence. With upthrust snout cleaving the way, it ran through the sea like a snake, and the opening of the conning tower was like the opening of jaws.

On the bridge of the *Mozambique* the captain held his hand where it had flashed toward the engine-room telegraph.

"He sees us," he said, "but he doesn't want us. We're just so much scum to him, too. He's after the *Rochefort*."

"How about our gun, sir?"

"Useless. It's on the stern, and he's almost directly ahead. We're only junk, you know. We're supposed to run from submarines, not chase after them."

The mate nodded jerkily. It was tantalizing to the nerves to stand by helpless, watching while a long gray gun nosed its gaping muzzle out over the U-boat's foredeck.

It swung back and forth with a slow, tonguelike motion until the sun caught it and sent shivers of light flashing along its length. Then it steadied with the poise of a crouching animal. The mate saw the muzzle rise in an unflurried arc, and he ground his fist against the rail of the bridge. An instant later there came a shot.

"He'll stop her with gunfire," said the captain, through strangely drawn lips, "and finish her off with a torpedo when he gets within sure distance. Gad, I wish we had more speed."

"We're holding even with him." The mate's eyes were glued ahead.

Near the bow of the *Rochefort* a wide column of water rose with a dull explosion in a fan-shaped mass.

"Overreached," said the mate. "I think he's slowing down."

"Within range," answered the captain, "and saving fuel. He may be sorry for that. Is the gun crew ready?".

The mate glanced astern and nodded.

At the captain's curt order, the quartermaster spun the wheel in hands that shook on the spokes, and the *Mozambique* once more swung violently from her course, creaking a protest in every seam. The sun fell in a new angle across her decks and hid in the shadow of the after deckhouse the pitiful smallness of the gun that stretched over her taffrail.

The U-boat fired again.

"Closer this time," said the mate.

From the fleeing *Rochefort* came a series of long blasts. They were deep-throated, and ended in a sobbing gurgle of steam.

"Thinks we're running away," the captain remarked. "I hope Fritz thinks so, too. Angles are deceptive on the water. Get the men off the decks."

Presently the *Mozambique*, running on a tangent, slowly drew level with the U-boat some half a mile away to port. When the freighter had come well within range, her gun raised and spat in the shadow, and an answering cloud of spray fell across the grinning conning tower. Whereupon the *Mozambique* shrieked upon her whistle. From the hidden eyes of the U-boat she must have looked, with the ludicrous height of her bow and the blood-red smears on her sides, like some long-nosed hag capering against the sky.

The wave beside the U-boat's snout grew larger, and its speed doubled smoothly. The muzzle of the gun flashed again, and water spouted almost under the stern of the *Rochefort*. The liner trembled throughout her length. Her gun sprang into action for the first time, and an instant later disappeared in a rocketing smother of smoke.

The *Mozambique* saw, and veered away.

"Direct hit," said the captain. "We came into this too late, I'm afraid."

"The *Rochefort's* stopped," said the mate, turning suddenly.

"Got her propeller on that stern shot, then. That puts it up to us after all."

AHEAD, on a sea lit with sparkling flecks of cut steel, the *Rochefort* was drifting like a dead mass. The U-boat, its gray snout shattering brilliance before it, continued to glide forward with easy confidence. Presently it would submerge, and the comedy would be brought to a fitting conclusion.

Then the echoes of another shot rolled across the water, and the spray from another hissing shell stung the side of the conning tower. Off to port the *Mozambique*, rearing up, had slewed tipsily, and her high bow was lumbering through the waves to the defiant squeal of her whistle. Straight for the submarine she came, a square-nosed bulk of worthless hull gone amuck.

For a moment the U-boat slowed as if in confusion. The rush of the *Mozambique* was unprecedented. Freighters do not as a rule charge enemy submarines head-on in broad daylight. Then the lights on the muzzle of the gray gun snapped, and a shell screamed close above the *Mozambique's* quivering foremast. If the old scow insisted, the U-boat was agreeable to attending to her before going about more important business. The popgun on her stern was out of range now, and two or three shots should do it. The first shot carried away part of her bridge, and the second shot raked her port superstructure, smashing three boats in line. Her whistle stopped suddenly, but the red-splotched bow kept driving ahead.

On her bridge the captain turned with a shaken face to the mate.

"The boats are gone" he said. "We've got to finish it now."

The mate nodded, watching the submarine draw closer as if pulled by a relentless magnet.

"If they try another shot they'll never miss," he whispered.

The submarine was very near. Smudges along her narrow deck became seams and rivets, and a faint glow showed below the open top of the conning tower. The long gun swung slowly in its casing toward a deadlier range.

"I guess they've got us," said the captain. "Can you pray?"

"No sir . . . She hasn't elevated yet. She's waiting."

"Damn the elevation! If you can't pray, then sing—dance—curse—anything! Man, we'll go mad if we stand here like this!"

So above the decks of the *Mozambique* with her shattered bridge and splintered boats and the foam curling like two fangs from her ugly bow, rose the voice of the mate singing against the sob of the engines.

*"Ain't going to study war no more,*
*Study war no more,*
*I ain't going to study war no more!*
*Down by the riverside I'm going*
*to lay my burden down——"*

And the *Mozambique* matched the sound of the singer's voice with the roar of waters swirling past her sides, and beat time with the unshaken throb of her propeller.

Had the high-riding bow swerved from the gaunt directness of its charge, or faltered for an instant in its gait, the gray gun would have flamed again. But the freighter was too close, and it had too plainly the strength of a crazed purpose. The gun glinted once more in the sunlight, and silently vanished. Water began to rise in climbing ripples around the snout. The top of the conning tower clamped ponderously shut. With an uncanny ease the long thin decks slid under the waves.

After that things happened suddenly, and all at once. The mate's song choked, the *Rochefort's* whistle screamed aloud, and the light bow of the freighter surged upward with a leap. It swung down again in a grinding smash, and something grated harshly along the keel. The *Mozambique* shook convulsively, but did not slacken her pace. With smoke pouring from her funnel, and the smashed bulkheads of her starboard superstructure flapping loose like so many torn battle flags, she trampled the thing under her for her entire length, trampled it mercilessly and in dogged anger until it fell away limp from under her stern. Then great splotches of oil rose to cling around her quarters, and these she cut into shreds with the thumping blades of her propeller.

"Scum!" said her captain to himself softly. "They called you scum!"

THE *Mozambique* turned, and swung in a wide circle to return and trample again if necessary. But it was all over, and her captain drove her toward the jubilant signal flags that fluttered from the *Rochefort's* halyards.

Someone hailed him from the tall bridge as it glistened above his head with the sparkle of brass in the sunlight.

"Congratulations, Captain! The gunboat's on the way to pick us up. You'll get a citation and a new command for this, surely!"

"Thank you!" the captain called back. But he did not stop, and to himself he added, "A new coat of paint for the *Mozambique* would be more to the point . . . Mister Nickerson!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Tell the bos'n to take up that little job on the forepeak now, and tell him not to be stingy with the paint."

"Yes, sir." The mate started forward.

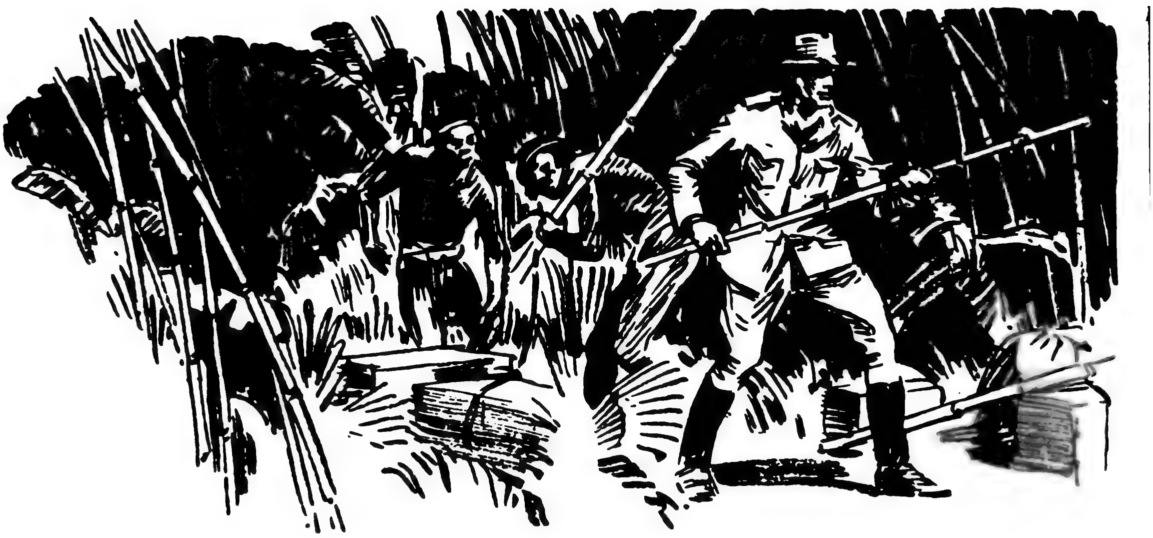
"And you might go below and have a look for strained seams. I doubt if you'll find anything serious, though. She's a tough old bird, and her bow was high enough to slide over him like a mudbank."

The mate went, feeling in his pockets for a cigaret. The captain walked over to one end of the bridge and curiously examined the wreckage there, whistling softly through his teeth.

*"Down by the riverside I'm going*
*to lay my burden down*
*'Cause I ain't going to study war no*
*more. . . . ."*

And the *Mozambique* headed into the western horizon, her bow lifted, and the square lines of her poop riding jauntily against the steely sparkle of the sea.

*Next month a new author tells another story of the undersea raiders, this time of a Yankee craft and a Yankee sailor—"Survival" by* L. MURNEY MINTZER. *It is a magnificent tale of sheer, unflinching courage at a time when death hovered close in the deep Atlantic.*



# SONS *of* ALLAH

## *A Complete Novelette*

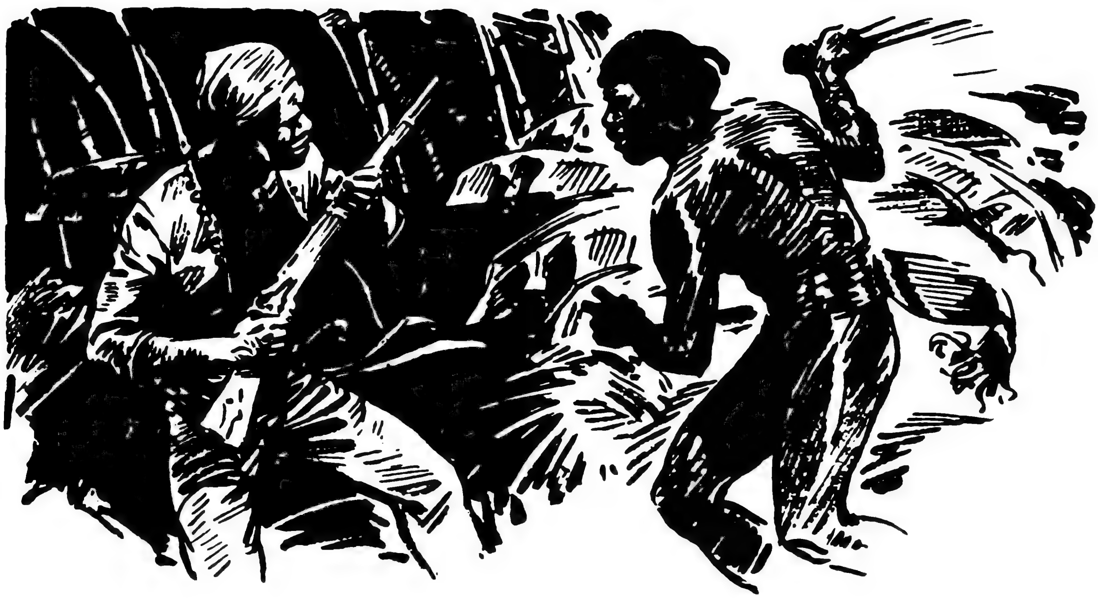
### By ARED WHITE

NATURE in all her seductive Oriental splendor failed to lure Lieutenant Carsden from the listless detachment in which he sat on the broad veranda of the old Spanish Club at Jolo. His eyes were fixed far out over the billowing azure reaches of the Sulu Sea. They seemed as blue as the sea itself, and as lacking in life and luster. Not even the ravishing symphony of color that crested the water as the sun plunged into the trackless west stirred his soul this afternoon; nor the quickening to life of the crimson fire trees flaming in the sunset breeze.

Evening after evening he had stood enthralled by the miracle of Jolo's sunset. At first the tropical beauty of the Sulu Sea had seemed to croon to him of mysterious adventure, of action to quicken the restless spirit of youth and feed into his veins an antidote against the consuming toxin of ennui that was killing him by inches. But it was all a hoax, a delusion. His soul was dead to the false promise at last. The fascinating beauty of the sea was coming to repel him with its mockery.

Marking time. Forever marking time. Sitting here of afternoons on the veranda sipping Barcelona vintages, watching the multicolored fish swim lazily about in the opalescent water at his feet. An hour now and then of limp conversation with brother officers who bemoaned chiefly their damning desolation and the racking inaction. Or listening to the insipid pleasantries and covert leers of Spanish gentlemen who persisted in comparing the mistaken weakness of Americans with the iron hand of Spain, in dealing with the insolent sons of Allah out in the jungles beyond the walled city.

Moral suasion. That was the weapon the cables from home had placed in their hands for the further subjugation of all Jolo. The expedition had taken the walled city itself from General Arolos' Spanish garrison without the firing of a shot. This was only to be expected, in view of the crushing lessons of Santiago and Manila. But the Moro infested jungles held forth no rosy promise of yielding to mere threat or moral suasion. Here lived some of the most powerful datos among Uncle Sam's suddenly acquired half million followers of Mohammed. Proud, resourceful warriors, highly suspicious of their new masters, burning with hatred of



## *The Story of a Heroic Mission in the Days When the Moro Datos of Mindinao Contemplated War Against the New Yankee Rule*

all Christians, fired by a fanaticism that nerved them to match Mohammedan *barong* against Christian Krag. And showing unmistakable signs that they were coming to mistake moral suasion for craven weakness.

Lieutenant Carsden was roused from his unhappy reverie by the appearance before him of an enlisted man. The soldier wore sidearms and stood patiently at attention until the young officer looked up and took from him an envelope. At sight of the message the lieutenant's pulse quickened. He tore it open with the eagerness of a hungry man who expects to find food. The message was from the adjutant at Jolo headquarters and was scrawled informally:

> *You will report here immediately after mess. A matter of importance. Appear casually and with no show of an official errand. Destroy this note by fire and mention it to no one.*

He initialed the empty envelope, handed the receipt to the messenger, put the message casually in the bellows pocket of his khaki blouse for later destruction, and drained his glass in a few gulps by way of relieving the sudden tension. It was another hour yet before mess call would sound in the garrison, and perhaps a half hour should elapse after dinner before he might find anyone at headquarters. A restlessness stirred in his veins at thought of the long wait.

His mind turned to an eager calculation of the meaning of the summons. Could it be that he was to have his opportunity in the jungles? A secret mission, unarmed, carrying the doctrine of moral suasion to some suspicious Moro dato in a remote jungle of Jolo? His pulse quickened at the thought. Such a risk as that would mean life—even though death stalked his course in every thicket and cogon patch. Carrying the doctrine of moral suasion into the enemy camp was nearly as good for his famished nerves as leading an armed detachment forward with carte blanche to fight. After all, he thought, it was not the slaughter of battle he craved, but an outlet for his pent-up energies, sustenance for the red corpuscles in his blood.

An alternative flashed into his mind to disturb this hope. It grew into a fear. Could it be that in some mysterious way headquarters had learned the truth of the incident of Señor Fernandez? His lips tightened as he thought of this grim possibility. Well, if that was it, headquarters would learn nothing from him. Not even under orders would he betray Sergeant O'Hara. Not even in the interest of moral suasion in Jolo. The Spaniard was fortunate, for that matter, at having escaped with his life. Sergeant O'Hara had done right, had done the thing any red blooded, fighting man would do; even if his defense would not be accepted by the cold reasoning of headquarters.

AS IF he had come in response to the lieutenant's thoughts, Señor Fernandez himself appeared suddenly at the table. Lieutenant Carsden looked up to find the wealthy Spanish pearl trader gazing at him in a way that suggested suspicion in his mind. He noted that Fernandez' olive skin was mottled with blue and purple blotches, mute evidence of the efficiency of O'Hara's hard knuckles. The piercing blackness of his sinister jet eyes was enhanced by deep blue circles, also O'Hara's handiwork, while his right arm was in a plaster cast; which told the officer for the first time that the drubbing was even more serious than he had suspected. The most serious injury of all, of course, did not show on the surface. It was the injury to Señor Fernandez' Spanish pride.

"Good evening, señor," Lieutenant Carsden greeted the other casually. He got to his feet and bowed with cold politeness. "I trust you are quite well."

Señor Fernandez bared his teeth in an unfriendly smile at the reference to his health, seated himself at the table and lighted a cigaret.

"My health is excellent, sir," replied Señor Fernandez. He blew a ring of smoke at the split bamboo sunbreak and added, "Excellent, considering conditions as they now exist in Jolo."

Lieutenant Carsden ignored the caustic note in the Spaniard's voice. He must use discretion and forebearance rather than quarrel lightly with Fernandez. The pearl trader was not without his influence at headquarters, an influence based on his knowledge of Jolo and his boasted friendship with several powerful datos. Besides, the policy of moral suasion did not encourage disagreeable relations even with the defeated Spanish.

"I take it, señor," replied Carsden lightly, "you have met with a disagreeable experience."

"Much so," said Fernandez. "A gentleman no longer is at ease going about in Jolo."

"The city is well garrisoned and most orderly," Carsden evaded. "Or perhaps Señor Fernandez was set upon at Bus-Bus by thieving natives."

"At Tulei," Fernandez corrected him. "The Lieutenant well knows, perhaps, it was not a native who ran amuck upon me."

Carsden started imperceptibly at this thrust.

"How should I know the details of the señor's unfortunate adventure?" he parried.

"I thought," said the Spaniard pointedly, "that what the Lieutenant had not seen, perhaps his Sergeant O'Hara had told him."

"Sergeant O'Hara—what has he got to do with it? Or I?" The lieutenant turned to the pearl trader in well simulated surprise and looked him squarely in the eye.

"Of that," said Fernandez coldly, "perhaps we shall learn in proper time."

An orderly from battalion headquarters appeared before them and saluted the lieutenant as he was on the point of replying more warmly to the Spaniard's insulting, if rather startling, inference.

"Sir, the Lieutenant's wanted by the major to report to him at once," droned the orderly.

As the officer returned the soldier's smart salute and arose to obey the peremptory summons of his immediate commander, Señor Fernandez bared his white teeth in another whimsical smile.

"Perhaps the Lieutenant's memory will serve him better when he sees his major," sneered the Spaniard. "Perhaps it will not be so light a matter that his Sergeant O'Hara ran amuck!"

"See here, Fernandez," Carsden exploded, "perhaps you think you know what you're talking about. But mark this! If Sergeant O'Hara beat anyone up, as your words seem to imply, let me tell you the fellow who got the drubbing richly deserved it, in my humble opinion. Adios, señor."

He turned quickly on his heel and hurried away, fearful to trust his rising wrath further to the Spaniard's disagreeable mood. Outside, in the thick shadows of the swift fallen night, his anger cooled quickly as he made his way along the broad, tree lined main thoroughfare of Jolo towards the large stone house that quartered his battalion commander. An uneasy apprehension overcame him. Fernandez would not have hinted so darkly at knowledge of the major's summons without reason.

But how had Fernandez guessed the truth about O'Hara? The mystery of this deepened as Carsden searched his mind. The fight had occurred in the unlighted street of Tulei, almost in the shadow of the Sultan of Sulu's local residence, less than a mile from the gates of the walled city. There had been but one witness: Pailo, the mestiza girl over whom they had fought. Sergeant O'Hara had reported direct to his lieutenant after the affair. He had told no one else. And Lieutenant Carsden, swearing him to secrecy, had gone to headquarters and had him substituted for duty on a hazardous detail that took him out of the walled city at reveille the next morning, before Fernandez could identify him in ranks by his swollen knuckles.

How, therefore, had Fernandez guessed at Carsden's knowledge of the fray? Pailo, he guessed, had followed O'Hara on his dangerous mission to the *barrio* of a powerful dato with a message of conciliation. Other Moros at Tulei would not have told, even had they known. There was deep mystery in O'Hara's influence in Tulei, an influence that had grown in two months to surpass that of blasé Spanish traders who had lived as many decades in the Sulu archipelago. The garrison had wondered at it, and sophisticated Spaniards had fondly predicted O'Hara's early demise on a *juramentado* blade. But the big, red faced noncom, with his brick colored hair, smooth Celtic tongue and fearless manner, came and went in perfect security to the nipa hut of Pailo in the village of Tulei. Higher officers who knew of it cited the experience of Sergeant O'Hara as a certain indication of the power of moral suasion.

## II

CARSDEN faced the major with such ease as he could muster, when he appeared at battalion headquarters. He had sensed, on entering the room, that Major Page was in a grim humor which would have short patience with equivocation.

"I am sorely embarrassed by a report that has come to me concerning you," the major began speaking with the incisive abruptness of a soldier of the old school. "Tell me what you know of this O'Hara matter!"

"To what does the Major refer, sir?" Carsden inquired stoutly.

"It would be much better, Carsden," snapped Major Page, "if you unmask your pretense and discuss this matter with me frankly and fully. I am reliably informed that Sergeant O'Hara shamefully assaulted our good friend, Señor Fernandez, over a Moro huzzy of some sort who really belongs to Fernandez."

"May I say that Sergeant O'Hara is an excellent soldier, sir," protested Carsden. "If he assaulted Fernandez, it must have been outside the garrison and on some rich provocation."

"Carsden, don't equivocate with me!" the major exploded. "I did not ask for a report from you on Sergeant O'Hara's qualifications as a soldier. I asked you for an official and authoritative report on what you know of his trouble. Answer my question!"

"Sir, may I impose upon my major's patience to ask one question before I answer?"

"What damned impertinence have you on your mind now?"

"Sir, I wished to ask if the major will inform me what Sergeant O'Hara is accused of. I mean in detail, sir."

"Yes. I'll tell you. Perhaps it will open your dull eyes to the seriousness of the situation. Fernandez says he had an ancient agreement for the acquisition of a Moro girl in payment of a debt. I don't know anything about such matters; or give a damn about these tropical doings. He was waiting for delivery until she was old enough. It seems that O'Hara some way or other got an eye on Fernandez' girl—she's a mestiza and not hard to look at, I'm told. Also, O'Hara hypnotized the girl's relatives. And when Fernandez went over to see about the matter ten days ago he was pounced upon and beaten half to death."

"Sir, did Fernandez intimate that he was in any way to blame for the fight, that he attempted to use first a cane and then a knife?"

"Naturally, no man would blame trouble on himself," the major sneered. "But from my point of view that is immaterial."

"Even, sir," persisted Carsden, "if Fernandez was attempting to take the young woman away by force in the presence of her defender?"

"Hell, no!" roared Major Page. "Our soldiers are in Jolo to establish peace, not to make love to heathens and stir up trouble with jealous fights. I intend to go the limit in this case. Now, out with your story without any further nonsense!"

For several moments Lieutenant Carsden stood looking at his major in silence. Carsden's features were boyish, except for the rather high cheekbones and the easy firmness of his small, full mouth. His clear, blue eyes were large, and at times held a luminous softness. In moments of stress, his sensitive features had a habit of freezing into a stolid expression, hard, unemotional, bored—the unyielding face of a professional poker player. This was his manner now as he confronted the demand that he give the information that would be certain to send Sergeant O'Hara to Bilibid.

"There is nothing of the matter for me to tell, sir," he said in a clear, easy voice.

"What's the meaning of this!" demanded Major Page, jumping to his feet and glaring menacingly. "Do you dare lie to your commanding officer!"

"It is not customary, sir, if I may so remind the major, to accuse an officer and a gentleman of lying," Lieutenant Carsden met the tempest.

"Don't you dare equivocate with me," Major Page thundered. "If I think one of my officers is lying, I'll tell him so. And what's more, I'll support it with charges if I have to. I think you're lying. That's it—just downright lying. You may be an officer; and you may be a gentleman by act of Congress. But let me remind you that it takes a sense of duty to make an officer and it takes a sense of honor to make a gentleman—Congress to the contrary, notwithstanding. Now for the last time: Are you going to tell the truth or are you going to perjure yourself?"

"Sir," Lieutenant Carsden calmly inquired, "have you ever heard it said of a man that he perjures himself like a gentleman?"

"What nonsense is this you are driving at now, Carsden?"

"Simply that there are times, sir, when a gentleman avoids the truth for the reason that it will not be wholly understood and will do far more harm than good."

"Now see here, Carsden!" Major Page curbed his temper and set out on a new tack, one of moral suasion. "I've got to have the facts in this case for the good of the regiment. Fernandez is badly hurt, inside and out. I've no inclination to make any trouble for you, despite the fact that you failed to make a report of the matter when it was brought to your attention. I am not even concerned with the report that you arranged to have O'Hara sent away on a headquarters mission when you should have sent him to the guardhouse. But I am concerned with O'Hara's brutal attack on Fernandez and I insist that you give me the facts."

"Permit me to remind the major that Sergeant O'Hara saved my life at San Isidro some months ago. He took an ugly bolo wound in the act, sir. Under the circumstances, even assuming that I knew anything, should I reward him by sending him to Bilibid?"

"Driveling mush, Carsden. Duty belongs above sentimentality, and no officer has a right to let personal considerations for his men stand between him and the orders of his commanding officer. Again I demand the facts!"

"I have nothing to say, sir, on the subject of O'Hara."

Major Page became livid.

"Lieutenant Carsden, you are treading upon exceedingly dangerous ground. Fernandez was good enough to come to me direct with his story. I want to handle it in my own way, since it belongs in my battalion. But if you persist in your present attitude, the matter will be referred to headquarters."

"You mean, sir, headquarters knows nothing of this?" Lieutenant Carsden's face brightened and he became tense with interest.

"Absolutely nothing. Otherwise I should not be so everlastingly patient in my effort to save you from your folly. For the last time: Are you going to give me the truth about O'Hara?"

"I have nothing to add to what I've said already, sir."

"You deny knowledge of O'Hara's assault upon Fernandez!"

The young officer swallowed hard before answering.

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Then, by God, I'll put you under official oath," Major Page thundered. "We'll see if you'll perjure yourself with your hand on the Bible. And if you do, let it be your own funeral!"

As the major bellowed for his adjutant, Lieutenant Carsden glanced at his watch. It was six o'clock. Mess call had sounded. Above the major's threat and bluster, one thought stood out in his mind above all others. Headquarters at Jolo did not know of O'Hara's affair with Fernandez. Then there could be but one probable reason why headquarters had ordered him to report, secretly, immediately after mess.

"May I be excused, sir?" he inquired casually of Major Page.

"Excused for what? What do you mean by that ridiculous request?" Major Page demanded.

"I can't tell you, sir," Carsden replied evenly, "except that it is essential for me to leave at once."

His strange request stirred the major to new fury.

"Carsden, you are getting positively irrational. Have you been drinking too much or are you out of your head! Did you not just hear me say that I was going to put you under oath."

"There's nothing unreasonable in my statement, sir. I am not allowed to disclose my orders to anyone; but they are from the commanding officer of Jolo, and they require my presence elsewhere at this moment."

Major Page's sharp, gray eyes narrowed in acute suspicion.

"I'll verify your statement if you leave on that pretext," he threatened.

As Lieutenant Carsden stiffened at attention to indicate his impending departure, the major added grimly:

"And the minute you are clear of whatever duty you think you're doing for headquarters you will report back to me instantly. I'm going to put you under oath. And I'm going to the bottom of this O'Hara matter if I have to break you for perjury."

"Very good, sir," replied Lieutenant Carsden.

HEADQUARTERS of the garrison was deserted, except for the musician of the guard and the adjutant's orderly when Lieutenant Carsden reached there. He paced the floor of the sergeant major's room during the interminable wait of fifteen minutes that preceded the return from mess of the colonel and his staff. His mind did not revert to the unpleasant session with Major Page. Luckily his resourcefulness had enabled him to avoid a statement under oath for the time being. As for the future . . . It was not Lieutenant Carsden's habit to fret about the future. His whole being was now filled with the hope of impending action.

His eyes burned with eager expectation as he saw the garrison commander enter the door. The adjutant directed him into the colonel's office at once. It was with an effort that he set his features in an expression of official detachment.

"Close the door," the colonel directed him.

When this was done he sat for several moments studying the young officer without appearing to do so.

"Lieutenant," the colonel began in a voice that indicated that he had dined successfully, "you have been recommended to me as an officer of more than average resourcefulness and courage."

"Thank you, sir."

"However, I want to say that the duty I have in mind for you is entirely optional. In other words, it is a duty calling for voluntary acceptance because of its exceedingly hazardous nature and the fact that it is beyond the ordinary call of official duty."

The young officer's pulse leaped in exultation at these words, but he managed to preserve his detached official manner and reply in an even voice:

"Very good, sir."

"The situation is just this," the colonel proceeded bluntly. "There's something wrong with two of our most powerful datos—Majahnke and Joakajain. We get word that they are being stirred up by all sorts of malicious reports from somewhere or other. They've even got the gossip that the Sultan of Sulu is selling them out to us for five thousand dollars, gold. They're stewing in the belief that we're going to try to interfere with their religion and customs, make them divorce their surplus wives, free their serfs, pay ruinous taxes—in short, model their lives to meet our own customs. Mere jungle grapevine, maybe, although it may be there's deliberate treachery behind it all. While they are outwardly peaceable at present, we know that hostile feeling is increasing and we may wake up with a serious religious war on our hands unless they get the truth of things poured into them. Do you see the situation, Lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, if we send an armed force out, it may start trouble. Not that we can't finish any trouble in short order. But the War Department wants us to use moral suasion as long as we can. So I'm going to send an officer out to parley with them and try to get the truth of our friendly intentions through their unsociable skulls. The thing that encourages us in trying this is that the Sultan is willing to help us. We've got a treaty in the brew with him. And I've recommended paying him the five thousand, which seems to be the key to his friendship. So he's anxious to make good with us. But the trouble with the Sultan is he isn't very prompt, and it's up to us to get in touch with the two datos ourselves, through him. These jungle folks have got the *mañana* habit from the Spanish. And that's one reason I'm hopeful nothing has happened to a noncom we sent out ten days ago with a friendly message in Arabic addressed to the datos. But the fact remains, he's overdue back. And from the reports I get I can't take any chances of having those datos go off on a tangent without exhausting every means to make good on the mission assigned us by higher authority, of maintaining peace."

"The soldier is Sergeant O'Hara of my outfit, sir," said Lieutenant Carsden. "An excellent soldier who will stop at nothing in the performance of his duty."

"So I understood. And also he seems to have gotten along well with the Moros at Tulei. But the fact remains that he isn't back yet. It may be that he's waiting for the answer to our message. Or it may be that he has been hacked to pieces by a *barong*. There's no making sure what's going to happen to a man when he goes out among those Moros with no other weapon than an olive branch. Personally, I wouldn't trust an unfriendly Moro across the room."

Lieutenant Carsden looked back easily at the colonel and offered no comment.

"The officer who accepts this mission," the colonel proceeded, "must cross the Island, first, to Maibun, the Sultan's jungle capital. That means twelve miles over a fairly good trail, which will be safe enough unless some Moro runs amuck along the way. After a conference with the Sultan, the real danger begins: the journey of seventeen miles afoot over a twisting trail into the jungle stronghold of the two datos. We've heard of no *juramentados* of late, but the priests may anoint half a dozen of them and turn them loose with their *barongs* when they hear a Christian is on the trail. Then there is the question of how the two datos will behave, even if our emissary succeeds in getting through. One of them, Dato Joakajain, is said to be rather level-headed and peaceable by inclination. The other, if we may believe the Sultan, is a half-caste Spaniard, Majahnke, who is described as being arrogant, cold-blooded, treacherous and well educated. A dangerous combination. So you can see this is to be no picnic for whoever goes, is it, Lieutenant?"

"No, sir."

"I neglected to mention another disagreeable feature. The officer must go absolutely unarmed. While that is necessary as an evidence of our pacific intentions, it leaves the officer at the mercy of anyone who attacks him. Under the circumstances, Lieutenant, do you wish to volunteer for the mission I have just described?"

The lieutenant's expression remained unchanged as he answered promptly in a firm, level voice:

"Yes, sir."

The colonel lighted a vile Manila *cigarro* and proceeded with brief detailed instruction. The Moro datos were to be assured that the Americans wished only to live in peace with them. They would not be taxed oppressively. Their religious rights as sons of Allah would be respected. The number of their wives would be left entirely to their own discretion. If they felt themselves aggrieved, they must come to Jolo to talk it over and not start religious war on rumor. Just how he was to accomplish his mission, or how long he was to be absent on that duty, was left to the discretion of Lieutenant Carsden. His own resourcefulness was his only dependence. He must leave secretly and guard his mission against possible betrayal. The officer listened in attentive silence to the instructions. When the colonel finished speaking, Carsden drew himself up formally.

"Was there anything further the Colonel wished to say to Lieutenant Carsden?" he inquired.

"Not unless there are questions you wish to ask me."

"None, sir."

"Then you may start as soon as you are ready. And good luck to you, young man. That's all."

"Thank you, sir."

## III

HEADQUARTERS had made carefull preparations for this first peaceful American expedition into the haunts of suspicious Moro datos. When he reported to the adjutant for his final instructions, Lieutenant Carsden found that the most important part of these preparations consisted of the swearing into emergency service of one Toulawei, a renegade Moro who had been taken over from the Spanish. The adjutant merely brought Toulawei into the room for a moment for purposes of identification and then permitted him to leave.

Toulawei was a squatty, rather fat little native with a rotund, oily face, the predominant features of which were low jowls and cold, beady eyes. His very being seemed to reek of treachery and violence.

"It would seem to me, sir," remarked Lieutenant Carsden when his intended guide and interpreter had glided noiselessly out through a rear door, "that there will be cutthroats enough out in the jungle without taking one along with me."

"That little heathen is safe enough," said the adjutant. He smiled significantly. "He may be a cutthroat, as you say—but he's now our cutthroat."

"His eyes are those of a python," objected Carsden.

"True enough," affirmed the adjutant. "But, as I've already suggested, he's a pet snake and will not bite the hand that feeds him. You see, we've gone into his case from one end to the other. The Spanish garrison used him for over five years and got so they never questioned his loyalty. Toulawei thinks far more of his Moro belly than of his Mohammedan soul. So long as we give him the wherewithal to fatten on here in the walled city with his dozen wives, Toulawei's loyalty is unquenchable."

"But what's to prevent him from running a *barong* across my throat in the night and coming back with a sad tale of attack by *juramentados?*"

"Everything. That chap's been about half sick with fear that his career ended with the Spanish. He's had a taste of the white man's largess and he's got no heart for going back to the jungles to live. So we've let him know that he's on trial—if anything happens to you, his services are ended."

"Of course, if your theories of native psychology should happen to be at fault," smiled Lieutenant Carsden, "my carcass at least will have served the useful purpose of demonstrating the fact."

"Oh, I know how you feel after a look at Toulawei," rejoined the adjutant. "But we've made sure you can depend upon him. For no matter how badly Toulawei might want to slam his *barong* across your neck, he'd far rather die than lose his happy home here in the Jolo garrison."

"I'll risk him on your recommendation," said Carsden, "although I can find no enthusiasm for that kind of a reptile, no matter how well he performs."

IN THE dark hour just before dawn, the emissary to the Moro stronghold departed from Jolo through a secret underground aperture in the city's protecting wall. He went unarmed and without equipment, guided by a rough pencil sketch of the route to a designated bamboo thicket on the trail to Maibun. There Toulawei would meet him with the impedimenta, an hour after daybreak, provided he was certain the prying eyes of treacherous white men in Jolo had not detected the move. For discovery in leaving Jolo might mean malignant rumors sent ahead into the jungles.

Toulawei, for his part, lounged down the main thoroughfare well after daybreak. He dragged his patent leather shoes in the white coral sand with all the leisurely indolence of a native upon whose shoulders time rests heavily. He was dressed as for a gala occasion that suggested anything but travel; a large scarlet turban, purple trousers that were almost skin tight, an embroidered bolo jacket, a vivid green shirt, buttoned to the neck, and a gaudy striped sash from which a silver handled kris hung jauntily.

Arriving at the main gate, Toulawei passed out, started lazily in the direction of Bus-Bus, hesitated, and turned back into Tulei. As soon as he was out of sight of the Jolo gate, he sat down, drew off the patent leather shoes with a grimace of deep relief, secreted them in a cogon patch and pattered on at a rapid gait. In Tulei he was joined by half a dozen of his countrymen, scantily clad and armed with *barongs,* who followed him at a distance into the narrow, jungle path that led towards Maibun.

At a trail intersection in the heart of a bamboo thicket half a mile from the village, Toulawei led his retainers off the trail to a cache of supplies that had been secreted there under cover of darkness. The natives loaded themselves with heavy knapsacks of tinned army rations and each one then added to his burden a long, thick section of bamboo filled with fresh drinking water. Toulawei took for his share of the load a short, murderous Spanish musket whose bore was large enough for a fowling piece.

A hundred paces further up the trail, as he came to the rendezvous, Toulawei's beady eyes lighted up with joy at sight of Lieutenant Carsden who emerged from a bamboo thicket and casually returned his Moro retainer's sweeping Spanish salute.

"*Buenos dias, Señor Lieutenant!* I fear ver' much señor lose his way and not be here," Toulawei cried in English that had an odd taint of both Spanish and Moro accent. "Allah is with us, for no eyes have seen us leave from Tiangy (Jolo)."

Lieutenant Carsden pointed severely at the musket which Toulawei was carrying at full cock, the butt resting on his hip, his right hand firmly grasping the barrel ready for quick use.

"This is a friendly journey," he reminded the Moro. "In fact, my instructions were against carrying arms of any kind."

"Yes, señor mus' go without musket," Toulawei agreed. "But Toulawei is among his own people in his own country. It is well that I have the musket and kris. My hombres, also, they have each a *barong.*"

"Do you have to protect yourself against your own people in your own country?" Carsden inquired with a touch of irony, in the suspicion that perhaps the presence of a renegade Moro might incite attack rather than prevent it.

"Toulawei is ver' safe," said the interpreter. "But if we meet *juramentados* or bad Moros, Toulawei mus' shoot, maybe for señor who has no gun."

"You mean you'd shoot one of your own people on my account?" the lieutenant inquired pointedly.

Toulawei nodded very seriously, the other's subtle thrust lost to him.

"It give Toulawei ver' great pleasure," he said gravely.

THE road to Maibun led through an unending tropical tangle of green, the monotony of bamboo jungle broken at frequent intervals by betelnut trees, palms, coconut trees, *narras,* and an occasional giant *durian* whose stark bole rose to a height of fifty feet, surmounted by a veritable green haystack. They passed several small Moro *barrios* where turbaned natives worked in their fields behind sleepy buffaloes. There was no evidence of uneasiness or hostility in the scattered villages, and small interest among the natives in the passing expedition.

Nevertheless, Toulawei strode ahead in a state of high alertness, his beady eyes searching out every thicket as his sturdy legs stretched themselves forward in a swift gait that tried Carsden's endurance at times under the blazing sun. The jungle itself teemed with wild life that rose in grotesque protestation against the invasion. Parrots squawked at them. Now and then a wild pig scurried across the trail, or a puffy little lizard exploded with a wrathful sound that sounded for the world like someone crying in broken English "*choke you!*" A small colony of monkeys shortly grew into a vast cavalcade of simians, large and small, that followed on the flanks, scolding, screaming, and occasionally tossing a coconut down at them.

When one of these heavy missiles narrowly missed Lieutenant Carsden's head, Toulawei threw his musket to his shoulder and fired a shot at random to scatter the pestiferous concentration. An instant later the jungle resounded with hysterical chattering as a small monkey fell from a coconut tree, a victim of the .50 caliber bullet. Toulawei himself joined in the wailing and stood looking at the tragedy in mingled remorse and terror.

"Toulawei not mean it!" he cried. "Toulawei shoot to scare monkey—not kill. Ver' bad luck to kill monkey."

"Well, what's done is done," Lieutenant Carsden commented tersely, motioning the repentant Moro on his way. There was comfort in the discovery that Toulawei was capable of remorse. Perhaps his murderous appearance was merely a matter of externals, after all.

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THE calvacade emerged from the jungles into Maibun early in the afternoon, Toulawei maintaining his attitude of armed alertness as he passed through the clutter of bamboo houses and groups of stony eyed natives who gaped at them without stirring. If Lieutenant Carsden had expected to find the Sultan of Sulu living in a superjungle mansion of bamboo poles and cogon thatches, he was surprised by an imposing stone palace that appeared before his eyes in the heart of Maibun. It's architecture was modern and it was plainly the product of Spanish building skill. Except for the arched windows and portals, the palace was plain on the exterior and might have passed for an American prison with its heavily barred windows.

There was little formality in entering the Sultan's palace, once the presence of an American officer became known to the retainers who hovered about the entrance, armed with medieval blades and broad headed spears, rather than modern rifles. A tall, gaunt Moro, attired in a suit of European underwear surmounted by a turban of brilliant hue, came to the guarded main entrance, saluted, and asked in good English if señor bore credentials from the *Americano* commander at Jolo. Upon presenting his letter from headquarters, Lieutenant Carsden was admitted without further questioning. He found himself immediately in a grotesque and ominous company. The large room was filled with gaudily attired datos and *panditas,* retainers of the Sulu feudal lord, present at the royal palace for ceremony or confab.

Their jabbering hushed as the American officer entered with Toulawei, who had been permitted inside as interpreter after surrendering his musket and kris. They turned as one man to glower at Lieutenant Carsden in forbidding silence from under beetling black brows. There was no response to his friendly smile of greeting and the lieutenant, left among these leaders of his country's new wards for some minutes while the Sultan was apprised of his presence, took refuge in a calm aloofness, looking from one to another of them in an effort at easy unconcern. Not pleasant company in which to appear armed with nothing more formidable than an American olive branch, he thought. For if one of them did not draw kris and put thought into action, it was clearly for reason other than tolerance of the new invaders of their ancestral domains.

From this uncomfortable company Lieutenant Carsden was rescued presently by the Sultan's prime minister who wore the garb and kris of a dato. The prime minister's face was barely less hostile than that of the datos and *panditas* as he led the way without ceremony to a room on an upper floor where the Sultan was resting in seclusion through the heat of the afternoon. A moment later, Carsden found himself in a bare reception room fitted with a few bamboo chairs, a table of *narra* wood and numerous mirrors. The Sultan entered at once, his presence identified by the kowtowing of the prime minister and royal interpreter.

Lieutenant Carsden started at sight of the insipid native who ignored his formal salute and extended a limp, brown hand in greeting. There was not a single hint of mastery or leadership in the Sultan's make-up. He was fat, chubby and waddling of gait. His dark skin was puffy and pockmarked and his large, protuberant, black eyes were blasé and lusterless—the eyes of a dead pig. He wore a strangly, black mustache over a thick, coarse mouth that opened upon filed, sharklike teeth, stained and decayed by betelnut. His attire added nothing to the royal appearance, consisting of wrinkled gray trousers, soiled white shirt without collar or cuffs and a pair of large tan shoes. The only Oriental touch in his garb was the tight fitting turban of black velvet, a loosely tied cotton sash and numerous pearl rings. Moreover, His Highness was in a sullen humor and slumped into a chair to stare boorishly at his visitor.

"Please say to His Highness for me," Lieutenant Carsden finally addressed the interpreter, "that I am here on the mission of assuring the Datos Joakajain and Majahnke, at their *barrios*, of our peaceful and helpful intentions towards all Moros."

There was a voluble interchange of gutterals, growls and grunts at the end of which the interpreter reduced the Sultan's response to thick tongued but otherwise correct and understandable English.

"His Majesty wishes to know if you have with you cigarets?" said the interpreter.

The lieutenant's face dropped at this wholly unexpected demand. His last thought had been of manufactured cigarets as an accessory of peaceful relations. However, he met the situation by adeptly rolling a weed for the Sultan, who accepted it eagerly and smoked it at a few deep inhalations. His Highness—he affected no higher title—consumed half a dozen of the officer's hand rolled cigarets before he turned to his silver box with its ingredients for betelnut chewing.

"I do not wish to inconvenience His Highness," Lieutenant Carsden reminded the Sultan through the interpreter. "But the sun will soon be done and I have far yet to travel."

"His Highness has no wish for council until he has broken his fast," was the royal response. "That shall occur immediately upon the setting of the sun. His Highness therefore wishes that his American brother remain at the palace until the sun appears again on the morrow."

Following this edict, Hadji mustered energy to rouse himself to his feet, and toddled off without ceremony to an inner sanctum that was shut off by heavy fiber curtains. A few moments later, sonorous snoring betrayed the purpose of his withdrawal. Lieutenant Carsden settled down in small satisfaction for the inevitable Spanish *mañana*.

WHATEVER the Sultan's lack of magnificence in personal dress and manner, his cuisine measured up to the most lavish expectations of what a Sulu potentate's table should be. The prime minister himself escorted Lieutenant Carsden to the dining room promptly at sundown. Hadji, still dishabille, was seated already and breaking his fast avidly. The table was of carved teak and provided with rare chinaware and European cutlery, while the courses were brought in one at a time by a small army of turbaned, but otherwise half naked, male servants.

Only the crown prince, a slender Moro youth in native costume of bright hues, the prime minister and Lieutenant Carsden were permitted at the Sultan's table. There was no conversation as Hadji gave his full thought to the rare dishes that were laid before him. And it required the greater part of two hours for the Sultan to finish breaking his fast. He ate ravenously at first, then settled down in the leisurely gustatory relish of a gormand as he stuffed himself with an unbelievable quantity of food. The repast began with bird's nest soup and was followed by sections of raw fish, fried fins of shark, broiled grasshoppers, mangoes, *papaya* salads, Spanish bread, toucan birds and other wild fowl, together with arrays of tropical fruits.

No matter what fears haunted the political and spiritual head of Moroland, indigestion was not one of them, and after he had consumed food enough to founder half a dozen ordinary men, Hadji pushed back his chair in evident satisfaction with life. He gave his fat arm to a retainer who boosted him to his feet and assisted him into an adjoining room where he sat down for his after-dinner chew of quartered betelnuts which were served him by a special retainer out of a carved silver box. After numerous expectorations, he dismissed his knight of the betelnut box and turned in an easier humor to the subject of international relations.

In speaking, Hadji addressed Lieutenant Carsden quite as if the American officer understood what was being said.

The interpreter then reduced the words to their nearest English equivalent.

"His Highness is very much pleased to have an American officer as his guest," said the interpreter. "His Highness has a very great favor to ask of his white brother."

"I am only a representative of the American commander," said Carsden cautiously, "but I will be very glad to convey any request His Highness may wish to present to our people."

"His Highness," said the interpreter, after a long period of Sultanic jabbering and gesticulation, "wishes that he be given the secret of making cigarets as his brother makes them. It is with great difficulty that His Highness is able to procure *Americano* cigarets."

The officer promptly tendered his services as instructor in rolling tobacco into rice paper. Hadji, whose first thought seemed centered on his appetites and vices, insisted on mastering the art personally rather than assigning one of his innumerable flunkeys to duty as a roller. For more than an hour he was absorbed in the intricacies of learning to roll his own, while matters of state remained in status quo. Carsden suppressed his own disgust and impatience in the thought that he was at least establishing friendly relations which might aid his negotiations once he succeeded in centering the Sultan's mind on official business. The subject of peaceful relations with the Moros was precipitated into the situation presently when the Sultan, in return for several bags of cigaret tobacco, presented the officer with a flashing, pearl handled kris which the prime minister thrust into Carsden's belt.

"But it is against my orders to go armed among your people," said Lieutenant Carsden in embarrassment lest he offend the vain Hadji.

Hadji's dull eyes quickened as this was explained to him by the interpreter. He replied with noisy gesticulations.

"His Highness says that if his brother goes to the *barrio* of Dato Majahnke it is well that he be well armed," said the interpreter. "His Highness would be pleased if the *Americanos* sent many soldiers armed with muskets to talk to Majahnke."

"Our people wish only to help your people, not to kill them," Carsden responded. "We prove our good faith by going unarmed to talk with your datos."

The Sultan snorted his disgust when he heard this.

"Majahnke is an insubordinate pig—a *perdido!*" the interpreter translated. "He has been spoiled by his Spanish blood. He has strange dreams of power and it would only serve him right to be buried with the carcass of a pig so that his soul might be eternally damned."

"I am instructed to say," said Carsden, "that we look to Your Highness to counsel peace among your datos. It was for a letter to Majahnke and Joakajain, ordering my safety while in their country, that I was instructed to call upon Your Highness."

"It would not please His Highness to honor Majahnke with an order at present," came the interpreter's response. "He is not deserving of the notice of His Highness until he has been disciplined."

"But can't all that wait?" Carsden persisted. "I must proceed to their *barrios*. And our colonel has said that Your Highness will be responsible for the acts of his datos towards Americans."

A lengthy and animated interchange followed between Hadji and his prime minister in which were notes of acrimony, discord and dispute. At the end of the powwow, the Sultan turned to Carsden with a shrug of his porcine shoulders and launched into a lengthy discourse which was repeated piecemeal by the interpreter.

"For two days now my datos have been at my place," said Hadji. "I have revealed to them that our American brothers are not cruel like the Spanish but wish to live in peace with all Moros and help us to prosper. I have warned them that they must not kill an American; that our brothers are like a box of matches. If one is struck, the wrath of all blazes forth upon the guilty. My datos are filled with suspicion, since they can believe no good can come from Christians. Yet they have accepted my orders. All but Majahnke and Joakajain, who have failed to appear at my palace. For this I must deal with them as they deserve."

"It may be," Carsden argued after some moments of reflection upon this situation, "that they meant no open affront to Your Highness."

"They shall pay the penalty!" Hadji affirmed stolidly. "My soldiers await only the payment to me by your people of five thousand gold pesos which we have agreed as the price of my services."

"But that must await an appropriation of Congress," said Carsden. "It may be months from now before there is action. And I know it is for the peaceful intervention and influence of Your Highness that payment has been considered. If it comes to a fight, our soldiers are well able to take care of the situation without help."

"Do the Americans expect of His Highness that he shall trail his pride in the dust by honoring Majahnke with a royal order before he has been properly humbled for his disobedience?" Hadji demanded testily.

"If Your Highness is to serve my people, it must be in the way they have chosen—the way of peace," said Carsden. "It is a time now for all to have great patience. I am certain my people will not pay one single gold peso for armed help which they do not need if trouble comes."

"I must counsel the Señor Lieutenant that perhaps it is better for him to return to Tiangy for the present," said the Sultan, unaffected.

Carsden's jaw set.

"I have my orders," he affirmed. "They require me to leave without unnecessary delay. That I shall do."

Another heated discussion occurred between Hadji and his adviser. Although he could understand no word of what they said, Carsden divined that the Sultan was torn by conflicting fears. Finally Hadji calmed himself and turned with an expressionless face.

"We shall yield to the wishes of our American brothers," he decreed. "Since señor must go, my orders to Majahnke shall be placed in your hands. Then if the traitor does not obey, my soldiers shall join with yours in treating with him."

## IV

WHEN Lieutenant Carsden plunged into the tangled jungle again with the rising sun at his back the next morning, his zest for the adventure was dulled somewhat by a sense of the unequal game he waged with his life. The Sultan's formal order commanding his safety had been delivered to him by a blinking retainer as he left the sleeping palace. But he had a strong feeling that both his mission and his person would be far more secure if backed by a squad of his own riflemen. He vowed to himself that he would gladly barter the Sultan's royal mandate and the services of Toulawei combined for the privilege of carrying a revolving .45 in his belt and a bolt action Krag on his shoulder.

But Carsden quickly dismissed these uneasy reflections with a grim smile. It was not the part of a soldier to be unseating his nerves with gloomy forebodings. After all, he asked himself, was not this unarmed mission vastly preferable to the stupid inaction of Jolo?

Toulawei pattered ahead of him just short of a trot. The Moro renegade had left Maibun behind with evident relish, and as the Sultan's palace faded in the background he regained his strutting assurance. He continued slightly ahead as a vanguard, his musket ready at his hip, his head turning from side to side as if on a pivot, while he searched out every place where danger might lurk. The six Moro carriers jolted along behind with the water and rations which, so far, had not been needed.

According to Lieutenant Carsden's calculations, he would reach his destination about noon, without hurrying. With no knowledge of the situation that would then confront him, it was impossible to formulate any plans. He must depend upon his own resources and meet the situation as it developed.

The country through which they passed was almost identical with that through which they had come on the day preceding, except that the trail was very narrow and the dank jungle growth more impenetrable. The place was a veritable heaven of chattering monkeys who collected by scores and followed them with wild jabbering and the occasional throwing of coconuts. To this demonstration Toulawei paid no attention, evidently in the memory of the tragedy that had disturbed the serenity of his heathen soul on the day before.

Late in the morning, when they had completed the greater part of the hot journey without mishap or incident, Lieutenant Carsden was brought suddenly face to face with the treachery that lurked on Moro trails and the blood lust that reeked behind Toulawei's pythonlike eyes. Toulawei had turned after a lone Moro youth who passed them on the trail, an angular, dull-faced native who wore an elaborately carved *barong* in his coarse fiber sash. Carsden had thought nothing of the incident until he was attracted by a ghastly outcry and turned to see Toulawei fell his victim with a prodigious swing of his heavy *barong.* Toulawei casually extracted the dead man's *barong,* thrust it in his own sash and came striding back with as little unconcern as if he had killed a lizard.

Carsden, his blood leaping to the boiling point, reached instinctively to his hip. The fact that he was unarmed did not deter him. He bore down upon the red handed cutthroat with flashing eyes, livid with passion at the brutal murder.

"If I had a gun I'd shoot you like the dog you are, for that!" he raged, pointing a menacing finger at Toulawei.

Toulawei looked at him with the groveling misery of a dog that had been kicked by its master for some unsuspected offense.

"Toulawei not mean anything bad," he whined abjectly.

"I knew you were a human snake the minute I looked at you. But I didn't think you were the dirty snake you are!" Carsden raged.

"Why the señor mad?" the squatty savage trembled. "Toulawei kill many bad Moros. Nobody care."

"You murdered that man for his *barong,* you hyena," Carsden snarled.

Toulawei, sensing his master's fiery humor rather than understanding the reason for it, held up the victim's *barong* for inspection.

"Ver' fine *barong,*" he pleaded. "Toulawei get *barong* for club of *Americano* officers at Jolo, señor."

As Carsden stood glaring, transfixed by horror at the tragedy, uncertain whether to order Toulawei summarily back to Jolo, the guide slunk past him on the trail and resumed the march, crestfallen but with his head moving from side to side alertly. Presently Carsden followed. It came to him that dangers enough beset his course without severing the one tie that kept Toulawei's *barong* off his own throat. It was not improbable that Toulawei told the truth as to his motive—murder for a rare *barong* to hang on the wall of the American officers' club at Jolo. Murder, to curry a bit of favor with his new masters! Well, he would deal with Toulawei at the proper time. Such practices might be winked at by the old Spanish garrison; but Toulawei had ended his usefulness to the American service. It would remain for the judge advocate to define the crime and fix its penalty.

BARELY had Carsden mastered his passion than the Moro trail burst into a new fury. Toulawei's voice cried out in warning as a brown body came leaping at them down the trail. Carsden saw an infuriated native, his eyes distended in a wild, fanatical rage, his right arm drawn back for a devastating blow of his heavy *barong* blade. Even in the excitement of the moment Carsden's eye caught strange details of the ominous apparition during the few swift seconds in which the tragedy unfolded. The sun glistened on the black hair of the attacking Moro, hair laid with coconut oil anointed by *panditas.* His fiber sash became unfastened in the vigor of his furious forward bounds and fell to the ground.

He saw Toulawei square himself to meet the attack. Toulawei did not jerk his musket excitedly to his shoulder. Instead he acted with cool deliberation, raising the weapon and taking careful aim. The infuriated Moro was within half a dozen paces when Toulawei fired. But for all his deliberation, his aim was faulty. The bullet went wild. Toulawei leaped back and flashed his kris from its sash. He was the fraction of a second too late to raise it effectively in defense. A moment later and Toulawei's skull was cleft by the other's *barong,* and he sank a victim of the murderous code of the Moro trail.

Carsden was rent by the sudden realization of his own complete helplessness as the Moro, with barely an instant's pause over the fallen Toulawei, leaped forward again. He felt an impulse to plunge headlong into the thick bamboo out of his assailant's course, but his mind told him the folly of flight. In his hand he carried a long bamboo pole that he had used as a cane. Instinctively he raised this, his only means of defense, and held his ground. A taut, grim smile rose to his face as he stood there waiting the moment of impact. It seemed many minutes that he waited through the infinitesimal moment that the assassin bore down upon him. He saw the sinewy brown arm leap behind the oily head. He caught the flash of the sun on the swinging blade of the deadly *barong*.

The picture swam, became confused to his mind. He saw the Moro throw his arms in the air and fling himself sidelong across the trail. At the same instant he heard a ringing in his ears. The scene cleared, became coherent again. The sound was that of a pistol. His assailant was twisting on the ground in the throes of death. Another figure appeared in the trail and came towards him, a smoking weapon in his hand.

This man was a perplexing figure, in whose appearance Lieutenant Carsden momentarily forgot his close brush with death. He had the high, thick cheeks of a Moro but his eyes and other features were not Jolonese. His eyes were large and brown and thoughtful, and his skin a delicate olive rather than of the brownish Moro tint. His black mustache was thick and well groomed and the trim black beard that framed his chin joined his lower lip by a thin line after the Portuguese fashion. His nose was conspicuously large and beakish and when he smiled pleasantly as he came forward, Carsden saw that the teeth were not filed nor stained by betelnut.

He wore native dress and in great elegance, with skin tight trousers of black broadcloth set off with burnished silver buttons, and a bolo jacket embroidered in silver figures. A cream colored silk shirt with loose, flaring collar, cordovan shoes, scarlet turban and a gay sash of silver cloth completed his attire. He greeted the American with a slight bow and a touching of his right hand to his turban.

"I wish to apologize for the annoyance to Señor Lieutenant," he said in excellent English. "I am very pleased that my good *pistola* did not fail me."

"I cannot accept apology from a gentleman whose only act has been to save my life," Lieutenant Carsden smiled, adapting himself to the other's gallant mood. "It seems to be my part to thank señor as best I can for his very great services to me."

"I should have fired sooner and spared señor's feelings," said the other, "except that I thought the señor's bodyguard would be more skilful with his musket. Nor did I know señor was so wholly unarmed."

"I am on a mission of peace," Carsden responded. "My instructions were that I bear no arms—as an evidence of our good faith. I did not know there were *juramentados* on the trail."

"There are no *juramentados*," the stranger corrected him politely. "You can see for yourself, señor, that his brows have not been shaved nor has he been anointed by the *panditas* with divine authority as a *juramentado* to seek the glory of his soul in the slaughter of Christians." There was a touch of satire in his voice as he said this. He added more complacently: "But who can know when one of these poor fellows will run amuck without authority and do mad things. Had I but known sooner of Señor Carsden's coming, I should have given him safe escort from Maibun—or perhaps from Jolo."

Carsden was betrayed into an expression of astonishment at sound of his own name from the lips of this strange creature. How could he have learned his identity, of his coming? The other read his thoughts before Carsden's face resumed its masklike placidity.

"Pardon, señor," he said addressing Carsden. "Permit me to present myself. I am the Dato Majahnke."

CARSDEN started perceptibly in spite of himself at this announcement. Prepared as he was to meet any strange situation that might arise in the stronghold of the two recalcitrant datos, his last expectation was that of finding in Majahnke a person with the outward graces of a polished Occidental. His picture of Majahnke had been that of a crafty, beady eyed mestizo Moro, fanatical and bestial and perhaps living in jungle squalor. Such a picture had grown in his mind until he had been prepared to recognize the dato. And it was Majahnke from whom he had expected the greatest danger to his own life. Now here he was, face to face with a host who had saved his life on the occasion of their first meeting.

"I am glad to meet the Dato Majahnke," replied Carsden, saluting formally and then extending his hand heartily. "The American commander will be highly grateful for the very fine service señor has performed this morning in protecting my life."

Majahnke shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"It was nothing, señor," he disclaimed. "I did only my duty as host. The señor would have been spared all inconvenience had your commander but notified me of Señor the Lieutenant's coming. I trust that the loss of his guide causes señor no great annoyance."

"I thought Toulawei a nuisance—until a moment ago," Carsden responded. "At last the poor fellow somewhat redeemed himself in my opinion."

The dato smiled whimsically.

"Toulawei is not worthy of any great sorrow, señor," said he. "A fellow of much practice who was no surer with his musket deserves to die. And if señor will accept my humble word, Toulawei's end was long past due."

"May I inquire about one of my men, a sergeant who came here ten days ago," Carsden changed the subject with eagerness in his voice.

"Ah, Sergeant O'Hara," Majahnke replied. "A most remarkable fellow. Yes, he is in the best of health as you may see for yourself very shortly."

Carsden, with a feeling of deep relief, drew his official papers from his bellows pocket and extended them.

"My credentials," he said. "They are from the American commander and His Highness, the Sultan Hadji, addressed to the Datos Majahnke and Joakajain."

"Let us dispense with formalities for the present," responded Majahnke with a slight baring of his white teeth. "My first thought is that señor is made comfortable after his long journey under the hot sun."

## V

THE Datos Majahnke and Joakajain had their quarters established in the rambling *barrio* which they called Ahka, a nondescript Moro village on stilts built along a sluggish stream. Ahka was the center of their large *pueblas* whose scattered little *barrios* boasted an aggregate population of some ten thousand natives. All of the houses of Ahka, including those of the feudal lords of the region, were of Moro construction: bamboo boles for uprights, sides of nipa and roofs of thick cogon. The floors, elevated several feet above ground and water, were of split bamboo. The number of rooms in each hut depended upon the station of the occupant rather than the size of the family. The average hut was of one small room regardless of the number of children. The fixtures were meager and depended upon the industry and skill of the occupants, who worked in the fields without wage as dependents of the dato who claimed immediate sovereignty over their destinies. The system of political organization had been adopted from the Spanish with such modifications as were necessary to the somewhat primitive Jolonese point of view.

The Dato Majahnke escorted Lieutenant Carsden to a large new nipa hut and indicated that it was set apart for his use while he remained at Ahka. The place had several rooms, furnished with native made chairs, a table of bamboo legs and *narra* top, and a pile of fiber mats for the customary bed on the springy split bamboo floor. The hut was without ornaments except for a large tray of hammered brass and a small, cheap mirror.

Several half naked, turbaned retainers appeared almost at once with steaming dishes of food, and Carsden, ravenous after his long hike, sat down to a meal of roasted goat meat, raw fish, boiled rice, wild chicken, fresh mangosteens and green tea.

"We did not touch the señor's rations which he brought with him," said Dato Majahnke who sat by without eating. "I trust our poor hospitality is acceptable."

"It's the best food I've had since I left the United States," said Carsden heartily. "I say this with all due respect to the hospitality of His Highness, the Sultan."

Majahnke smiled his satisfaction at this compliment.

"Perhaps señor has been much misled as to the virtues of my people," he rejoined, pointedly.

"It will give me great pleasure to report conditions as I find them when I return to Jolo," said Carsden, seizing the opportunity to broach the subject of his mission. "I am already convinced that our people have many things in common and that we can get along beautifully together."

"That," said Dato Majahnke, "must depend upon the wisdom of your people in seeing through the pretences of weak rascals." He shrugged his shoulders again. "Señor, no doubt, would prefer his siesta before discussing official matters."

"I do all of my sleeping nights," Carsden smiled. "Now that my stomach is full, I'm ready to get right down to business. Will señor accept my credentials?"

The dato took the letter from the American commander and read it respectfully. It was a brief, formal document merely indicating the pacific intentions of the American Army in Jolo and empowering Lieutenant Carsden to speak for the Americans on any and all details of mutual relationship upon which the datos and their subjects sought light.

"*Bueno,*" commented Majahnke laying the letter aside. As he took up the Sultan Hadji's letter, his movement was more abrupt and he shook the folded sheet open. Carsden saw a cynical smile spread over the dato's features as he read. The other's expression became disdainful, then contemptuous. He tossed the document on the table with an insolent flick of his hand.

"The insipid Hadji!" he exclaimed, speaking with biting precision through his clenched teeth. "He shall pay dearly for this insult."

"I trust I have not been the innocent means of conveying an offensive message," Carsden put in quickly. "We had no thought but that His Highness was in the good graces of his datos and wished sincerely to assist us in clearing up malicious rumors and misunderstanding that might cause great trouble between our people."

"Ah, but I do not mean to blame you, señor," said Majahnke. "The pig Hadji has deceived our American brothers just as he deceived the Spanish in Jolo and the English in Borneo. But that he should go so far as to represent me as a dangerous person! Indeed, Señor Lieutenant, I congratulate you at having escaped Hadji's royal cutthroats at Maibun where there is great treachery lurking at every hand."

"Well, I'm glad to know the situation," said Carsden affably. He proceeded to sidetrack the sensitive subject. "I would suggest that we drop Hadji, since you two don't hitch. And I'm glad you realize we were acting in perfectly good faith when we went to the Sultan for passports."

"But there is more—much more to be said about Hadji," Majahnke persisted. "The Americans are in great danger in all Sulu unless their eyes are opened quickly to the truth."

"I don't believe I fully understand, señor," Carsden countered.

"*Bueno!* Then I shall tell you all!" The dato paused, thought for a moment and changed the subject. "First, may I suggest that señor call upon my good brother, the Dato Joakajain? It is but a few steps to travel."

DATO JOAKAJAIN was a middle aged, wiry little native with characteristic Moro features. He had a clean cut face suggestive of the mulatto, closely cropped, bristly black hair and small keen eyes that narrowed in a suspicious glint as Carsden entered his large nipa hut escorted by Majahnke. Joakajain had affected his brother dato's style of beard with a resultant straggly fuzz on his chin and streaky black goatee. But he lacked the other's elegance, except for the elaborately carved silver handle of his kris. Carsden suppressed a smile at his attire, an ordinary combination suit of cotton underwear gathered at the middle by a broad green woolen sash. His turban was multicolored and fitted him illy.

"Our brother, Señor the Lieutenant Carsden, who comes from the Americans at Jolo for council," Majahnke exclaimed impressively, repeating his words immediately in Moro.

Joakajain arose from his bamboo settee but neither bowed nor spoke as he appraised the American officer with a searching, noncommital stare. About him were half a dozen armed retainers who displayed no better manners. Carsden extended his hand and greeted the Moro first in English, then in Spanish.

"No saby," Joakajain grunted and sat down.

Majahnke promptly withdrew, explaining that he had other matters to look after and that while Joakajain spoke no English, he was provided with a capable interpreter. The dato was ill at ease. He issued a guttural order, whereat a Moro lad quickly brought forward his copper betelnut box with its four compartments for lime, water, palm leaf and quartered nuts. He assembled the ingredients for indulgence, wrapped them in a young palm leaf and shoved the product in his mouth with all the solemnity of an American taking a chew of tobacco. Thus fortified, he turned to the interview.

His interpreter handled English with a very thick but otherwise coherent tongue. Joakajain listened with the bovine patience and expression of a cow chewing its cud while Lieutenant Carsden delivered the American assurances of good will. When it came his turn to speak, his jaws ceased their rotary motion and his eyes narrowed.

"Señor's words are sweet," repeated the interpreter, "but Joakajain has learned that the Christian *soldados* at Jolo have strange intentions. Is it not true that the Americans buried a Moro in the same grave with a pig so that his soul would be forever damned?"

"The Moro who was thus treated ran amuck upon our soldiers," Carsden explained. "It was done as a warning that the lives of Americans must be respected by all."

"A Moro's soul should not be condemned to everlasting damnation because of the acts of his body," replied Joakajain grimly. "We have the word that the Americans would destroy the soul of every Moro by forcing him to become Christian—or be stained by the blood of a pig."

"Nothing is farther from the thoughts of our people," Carsden affirmed. "I am authorized to say that your religion or your customs will not be disturbed."

"We learn that the Americans," Joakajain continued, "would force even our datos to cast aside all our wives but a single one for no other reason than that it is the American's strange custom to have but one wife."

"Again you have been imposed upon with misinformation," protested Carsden. "We have no intention of prescribing the number of your wives or interfering in any way with your private affairs."

"We learn that heavy taxes are to be levied upon us," Joakajain next charged, "to pay for your armies. Taxes that will crush us to pay; and yet if they are not paid you will seize our *pueblas*."

"Nominal taxes may be levied in time," said Carsden. "But I assure you that your datos will be called in conference first and an agreement reached as to what is fair and equable."

"What assurances have we that the American promises will be kept if we humbly bow our heads to the authority of your people?"

"The unimpeachable honor of a great and noble nation," said Carsden with a touch of pride. "Time and experience will teach you the great good fortune of all Moros that Americans have occupied your country."

Joakajain discoursed at some length among his retainers. His mood was even less inviting than before he had recited the Moro fears of American intentions. Yet he was not openly hostile.

"The Señor Lieutenant speaks well for his people," droned the thick tongued interpreter as Joakajain chattered his final conclusions. "But the Americans have come to Sulu at a grave and unfortunate time, so as to disturb great events that were in the making by Allah's will. Not until all the chiefs in the great *pueblas* of Joakajain and Majahnke have conferred upon their future course, can any decision be given the señor to carry to his people."

"How soon may we expect the conference of your chiefs?" Carsden asked.

"It awaits the word of my brother Majahnke," said the dato.

"And will we be given an opportunity to present the views of my people to your chiefs?"

"The American señor, O'Hara, may be present if it is so desired."

"But I am the American representative and alone empowered to speak for my people," said Carsden, perplexed by this unexpected turn of affairs. "O'Hara came here as a messenger and has no voice."

"Nevertheless," was Joakajain's solemn rejoinder, "it is impossible for the Señor Lieutenant to be received by the council. It would be offensive in the eyes of Allah for a Christian to sit at the table of the chiefs."

Carsden's perplexity became acute and he forgot for the moment the language of diplomacy.

"I don't get the idea," he broke over. "In addition to being the authorized representative, I'm a hell of a long ways from being the orthodox Christian O'Hara is."

Joakajain arose while the interpreter was still sputtering in an effort to translate this intricate thought. The dato's manner showed he was wearied of the conversation. His retainers stood up with him. The conversation was clearly at an end. Carsden, without attempting to carry his mission further for the present, promptly saluted his way out of the hut.

## VI

SERGEANT O'HARA occupied a nipa hut several hundred yards up the stream, to which place Lieutenant Carsden was escorted by Dato Joakajain's interpreter. While the lieutenant's arrival seemed to have caused little interest and no commotion in Ahka, Carsden was mildly nettled that the alert O'Hara had not sensed his presence. He dismissed the interpreter and climbed up into O'Hara's quarters. As he reached the elevated living room, O'Hara appeared suddenly rubbing his eyes as if to investigate the vibrations to his dwelling. At sight of the officer, his small green eyes started from their sockets.

"In the name of the Saints and am I a-seein' things!" Sergeant O'Hara blurted, rubbing his eyes again to make sure it was not an apparition. As his eyes confirmed the gladsome reality of the figure before him, he nearly embraced the officer in his joy, then remembered to snap to attention and salute respectfully. "Sure and the L'tenant is the last man I was expectin' to see in these parts," he exclaimed.

Carsden returned the salute and extended his hand in less formal greeting.

"I thought you'd learned to expect me most anywhere," he laughed. "But where have you been in hiding all afternoon?"

"Sure, sir, and I've been having a bit of bunk fatigue—without any bunk. And when did the Army arrive here, sir?"

"If you mean me, I arrived an hour or two ago. The Army is still down at Jolo sunning itself and killing time instead of Moros."

O'Hara's freckled red face registered incredulity.

"You mean, sir, the L'tenant comes alone into this nest of cutthroats—and no detachment?"

"Why not? Do you think you are the only bearer of a charmed life? Besides, I have been royally received all along the line—with one minor exception."

"I'd feel easier, sir, if the L'tenant had a armed escort to back him up," said O'Hara gravely. "But what is it, sir, brings you?"

"Well, for one thing, I wanted to find out if you'd fallen in love with the country and decided to settle here," Carsden bantered the sergeant. "Or perhaps you've joined the Moro Army?"

A look of helpless misery engulfed O'Hara's mobile features.

"Ah, sir, and I've been fed up for a week. But when I give these nabobs the colonel's letter they all keep sayin' '*mañana*'. They'll answer it—*mañana*. Sure, sir, and the worst thing them Spanish did to this poor country was bring in that *mañana* habit. I've been fearin', sir, I might have to wait here till after me enlistment is up before they'll decide its 'tomorrow' and let me have the answer."

"How have they been behaving towards you, O'Hara?"

"Fine, sir. Plenty to eat, go where I please. In addition to all the heathens, sir, there's one nabob here that's got everything beat I ever saw. His name's Majahnke, or however you say it. Best way to pronounce it is to gurgle a little, then choke—and you get the name just right."

"I met him on the trail—most fortunately. He does seem a pleasant fellow, although I haven't fathomed him yet."

"A smooth article, sir. And what he says sure goes around hereabouts. One bit of advice, though, for the L'tenant. Don't eat no meals with that—I can't even gurgle the name—but he's the other dato. His favorite dish is the tails of a big jungle lizard and he gets sore if you don't eat 'em. I nearly choked over my try at it."

"Have any trouble of any kind coming up on the trail, Sergeant?"

"No, sir I—" O'Hara's eyes dropped to the floor for an instant. "I ain't had no trouble anywhere. But that don't mean there ain't plenty of trouble to be located, sir. And I sure hope the L'tenant will stick close in his hut and not go gallivantin' around the country alone."

"What particular advantage, O'Hara, is there sticking close to one of these flimsy huts if somebody got ambitious to shed some good Christian blood?"

"Heathen superstition, sir. They won't come inside to get you. Not unless there's a real fight up. And there's nothing like that in the air, far's I can see. You'll be safe enough inside the nipa shack——"

O'Hara broke off speaking as the floor began to vibrate from the motion of someone climbing into the hut. His face became livid as he turned to the door and stood gaping with half open mouth. A moment later a native girl pushed aside the fiber covering and stood before them.

The girl stopped at sight of Carsden and her large jet eyes regarded him for a moment with mingled wonderment and fear. Carsden saw that she was not the ordinary jungle village type of houri. Her face was of that occasional rare mestiza beauty in which Castilian blood predominates, the white skin delicately tinted in olive, the jet hair straight and glossy, the features finely moulded with little hint of Moro ancestry. Just now her beauty was enhanced by the high color in her cheeks. She wore a black sarong and light blue *jabul* which were fitted with care to her lithe body. Her feet and legs were bare and burned a deep brown by the sun. After several moments of uncertainty, she dropped her eyes and stole past them into another room of the hut.

Carsden's face hardened.

"Is that the huzzy you had the trouble about with Fernandez?" he demanded sharply.

"Yes, sir," O'Hara confessed, crestfallen and scarlet.

"What do you mean jeopardizing the service by such conduct!" Lieutenant Carsden had ceased to be a friendly comrade in arms. He was the severe commanding officer taking an offending soldier to task. "Haven't you been in the service long enough to know that wenches don't mix with official business?"

"The L'tenant don't understand, sir," pleaded O'Hara. "And besides, sir, may I send her outside? Pailo savvies English enough to know what the L'tenant is sayin'."

Carsden awaited in forbidding silence while the sergeant sent the trembling native girl out of the hut.

"Now, the next thing is to see that she makes tracks right back where she comes from," Carsden ordered. "You'll answer to me for this folly when we get back to Jolo."

"But, sir, Pailo ain't caused no trouble," O'Hara cried. "Fact is, sir, she's been a big help if the L'tenant only'd hear the facts in the case, sir."

"No trouble, eh! You don't seem to know just how much trouble that little heathen has gotten you in. She's not only led you into a peck of trouble but she's got me in deep water as well, trying to keep you out of Bilibid."

"Sir, I don't know what the L'tenant means."

"Then I'll enlighten you. The cat is out of the bag about Fernandez. The major knows it was you who beat Fernandez up, and he knows why you did it. And what's more, he's itching to put you before a court."

O'Hara's face gathered.

"Why, he couldn't of found that out, sir. Nobody knew but Pailo and her relatives, and they come away with me next day to look after me on the trail."

"What's more, the major knows that I know all about it—even knows that I worked you in on this detail so Fernandez wouldn't spot you in the garrison. He's threatened to put me under oath in order to get at the facts."

"But, sir," Sergeant O'Hara objected, "there's something off-color there. I didn't even tell Pailo about that!"

"Let's not discuss the matter any further. You chase that wench on the trail for her own grass roofed bungalow as fast as you know how. A nice mess you're getting us into!"

"Sir, I can't very well do that." O'Hara's face was now colorless.

"When did you forget how to obey your orders, O'Hara!"

"The L'tenant doesn't understand, sir. Sure and—Pailo's last name is O'Hara."

Carsden studied his noncommissioned officer for several dumbfounded moments. O'Hara was the last soldier in the service of whom he had expected such a complication. In the three years since O'Hara's enlistment, he had developed into a red blooded, alert and capable noncom, passionate in his loyalty, dependable to the last degree in any duty. Neither women nor red liquor had ever bothered O'Hara longer than the day after pay day. When O'Hara thrashed the Spaniard, Fernandez, in the dark street of Tulei over a native girl, Carsden had not suspected for a moment that it was anything more than an incident growing out of a passing frolic.

"Perhaps you will be good enough to explain," Carsden finally resumed in a biting voice, "just how this dark haired fairy came by the splendid Irish name you just mentioned. I have not heard of our chaplain tying any slipknots since we came to Jolo."

"Has the L'tenant heard the old sayin' about doin' like the Romans when in Romany?"

"Quit talking to me in parables, O'Hara, and say what you've got to say about this sweet mess in straight English!"

"It happened at her church, sir—a mosque, they call it, with a gang of *panditas* yowlin' the weddin' march."

"O'Hara! Are you entirely out of your senses? Are you trying to tell me that in addition to risking your honor as an American soldier you've also bartered off your immortal soul for a barelegged heathen huzzy?"

"No, sir." O'Hara shifted from one foot to the other rapidly and looked back at the lieutenant in misery. "May I make a statement, sir? I mean in me own way, without the L'tenant flying up at me, sir?"

"If it's pertinent to the subject and doesn't impose too severely upon my intelligence, I'll hear what you have to say. Go ahead."

"SIR, when we lands in Jolo," O'Hara proceeded earnestly, "sure and I finds out there's one great fightin' word among these Moros. 'Christians!' Why, sir, it ain't murder for one of them to kill a Christian. It's a privilege. That's the one sure way for one of 'em to get into heaven. The more Christians one of 'em kills the bigger he stands with Allah—and if he can slap his *barong* into seven Christian headpieces, he gets into the Seventh Heaven which is a wonderful place with wine, women and song, accordin' to the Moro notion. That's great stuff for the datos and *panditas*. When they got something they want started, all they got to do is whisper '*Christian!*' and the heathen gang is out with their hay knives. What's more, did the L'tenant know they got 'em trained so they won't trust a Christian even when they know he's on the square with the Moros?"

"Never mind the discourse on Moro habits," broke in Lieutenant Carsden. "What I'm waiting for is your explanation about this wench of yours."

"That's all a part of it, sir, if the L'tenant'll only let me talk it out in me own way. It was while I was snoopin' around tryin' to find out what's goin' on, sir, I learns a trick or two. The hombre that sold these Moros their religion in the first place come into Sulu and didn't get a start until he marries a rajah's daughter. After that it was easy sailin'. Join up and you're one of the Allah gang and they'll believe you, sir, even if they know the truth ain't in you. Wasn't that the way the Spanish got inside and got a tip every time a batch of *juramentados* was about to be shaved and sicked loose? So, sir, thinks I, it's the part of a good soldier to get in and find out when anything was brewin'. Better than layin' around Jolo with me soul fagged out from doin' nothin', sir. What was the difference, so long as I'd be sailin' away one bright day for God's country again? So in I went, sir. And that's the truth of how it happened."

Carsden's face lit up with a cynical grin.

"What wonderful self-sacrifice," he said. "I've heard it said that patriotism is the last refuge of rascals. O'Hara, you were simply after that girl! You haven't seen a white one for so long this heathen was pretty enough to upset your senses. And I thought you were foolproof, or you wouldn't be wearing sergeant's chevrons in my outfit."

"On me word," O'Hara vowed almost tearfully, "I didn't see Pailo till I'd been to the mosque at Tulei, sir. She was down there that fine day prayin' to the heathen gods. And, thinks I, it's a chance to make a good job of it and get meself in solid with the Moros."

"The girl's extraordinary good looks had nothing whatever to do with your noble and unselfish decision?"

"I wouldn't say that's so." O'Hara reddened. "But it's sure turned out I was usin' me head."

"I take it that you married her with your fingers crossed, then," said Carsden. "Merely as an accessory of your self-imposed duty of local espionage."

"Yes, sir, that was me idea," affirmed O'Hara. He thought for a moment. "But I've found out Pailo's a good sort and I've thought, sir, when me term of enlistment is up——"

"Now we're getting a little closer to the truth, O'Hara," Carsden cut in. "After doing all these wonderful things for the good of the service, you're now letting the cat out of the bag by admitting you intend to leave the old outfit the minute your hitch is finished."

O'Hara studied the split bamboo floor uneasily for several moments.

"I was only thinkin' maybe it'd be the right thing in case there was any—any little O'Haras, sir. Sure an' I'm not the kind as would——"

"See here, O'Hara!" Carsden interrupted with sharp impatience. "This is the first time in all your service that I've had occasion to think you were dealing dishonestly with me. The way you're twisting up your statements is a reflection on my intelligence."

"On me word," O'Hara pleaded, an imploring look in his green eyes. "Sure, sir, and I swear by the ashes of all the Saints, sir, I'm tellin' of the whole truth to the L'tenant."

Carsden's humor broke and he smiled in spite of himself.

"That's a fine oath for a loyal son of Allah to try out on an unsuspecting Christian, Sergeant O'Hara!"

"Will the L'tenant excuse the oversight?" O'Hara laughed back, responding instantly to the other's change of mood. "Sure and I'll swear it over the bones of the prophets Mohammed and Ali, sir."

## VII

THE Dato Majahnke was loitering outside Carsden's nipa hut when they returned. Majahnke had provided two scrubby little native ponies upon which the two might ride over the *pueblas* while bodyguard and retainers followed on foot. Carsden accepted the proffered mount with little enthusiasm, since his feet dragged the ground from the pony's back and he correctly guessed that it would be easier to walk than keep his thick blooded charger in motion.

If Carsden had held any doubts as to the extent of Majahnke's domain they disappeared during the course of the inspection ride. Native villages, slashed out of the jungle, appeared in unending succession to the south and west of Ahka. Moreover, the region was as thickly populated this afternoon as an ant bed. Men seemed to have nothing to do except move about and show themselves with bristling lances, *barongs, compilans,* krises and an occasional ancient musket. Carsden quickly guessed that the Moslem warriors were not out by chance but for show, as a scheduled demonstration of strength, exactly as a more civilized people would stage a formal review of its fighting forces.

Majahnke's pride in his scattered army was boundless. He called attention to their number, the excellence of their equipment and dilated upon their fighting fury. He boasted that there was not a man among them who would not rejoice at the privilege of dying in the cause of their datos. Presently Majahnke brought up before a large nipa hut and dismounted. It was one of his residences, he explained, and here he wished señor to dine with him. In the fading sun outside was a large copper cage in which was a bird of strange colors. Majahnke stood before it for some moments, reflectively.

"*El pájara de siete colores*" (the bird of seven colors), he mused.

The plumage changed its color as the bird moved circumspectly about its cage. One moment it was dark green, the next a dull bronze. An instant later it appeared as by magic in feathers of steel blue which changed again to jet black.

"It is so," Majahnke said pointedly, turning to Carsden. "It is so the thoughts of my people change with my wishes. Peaceful now, ready for war in a moment. In all our *barrios* it is just as Majahnke thinks and says."

"We are indeed fortunate to have your good wishes, señor," said Carsden.

Majahnke lifted his brows and shrugged his shoulders.

"That is something for us to discuss, señor," he said. "But first, it is well that we should have food."

They ate in silence, since Majahnke seemed disinclined to break the leisurely gusto with which he partook of a meal barely less elaborate than that which the Sultan had served. At the end of the meal, the dato accepted Carsden's proffered cigaret, smoked it, then moved confidentially close to Carsden's seat.

"Is it señor's desire that we speak frankly?" he inquired.

There was an uncomfortable note in the other's voice which Carsden could not escape.

"That's the only way Americans care

to treat—with all the cards on the table," Carsden answered.

*"Bueno!* Then let us return to the subject of Hadji," Dato Majahnke began. "I am free to tell señor that all was ready for me to take Hadji's place at Maibun when the Spanish were forced to leave. . . . Why was that, señor? Because Hadji is weak and treacherous and there is no putting faith in his word. The Spanish were done with him. They saw that they were being robbed—buying his power with his people when he had no power. It is I, Majahnke, who has the power. That you have seen for yourself today, with your own eyes. Do I make myself clear, señor?"

"Perfectly," said Carsden, his face now a placid mask of boyish serenity. "But is it not better that we keep off the subject of Hadji and your troubles among yourselves."

"As for Hadji," Majahnke spoke up quickly, *"que vaya al infierno!* But what is there of peace to speak of with me unless the Americans wish to make use of my great services?"

"That is exactly what we want," said Carsden, avoiding the other's insinuation. "We want the good will of you and your people in return for the good offices of the Americans."

"Yet, I learn that you negotiate with Hadji," parried Majahnke. "I have it that your people will pay him five thousand gold pesos each year, as the English have done in Borneo, for his services in selling out his own people. *Diablo!* He has nothing to sell. It is Majahnke alone who can hold Sulu under his hand."

"We have signed no treaty to pay anything to Hadji."

"Ah, no. But it is up to the American chiefs for their action. Well do I know what goes on at Jolo, señor."

"What is it you would propose, then, that we should do?"

"That your people treat with me, Señor Lieutenant. It is I who have the power; it is I who should sit in the palace at Maibun—I, Majahnke, who understands the heart of his own people and the mind of the Christian at one time."

"I am without authority to treat with you on subjects as delicate as that," said Carsden crisply. "Besides, this is a poor time for anybody to be thinking of local differences. All my government wants to do now is make peace with all Moros and let them know we will treat them fairly. It was for that assurance I was sent here, and nothing beyond that."

Majahnke laughed disagreeably.

"Is it treating my people fairly to say that Majahnke shall bow to that *cochino,* Hadji, at Maibun! Is it for peace that señor asks me to abase myself and humble my people when I have many thousands of brave fighting men at my back! Soon there shall be a council of all our mandarins and their *panditas,* señor. Then shall we all be of one mind. Well do I know the answer, señor, unless Majahnke shall raise his voice for patience. Perhaps señor has read for himself their thoughts from the tongue of Joakajain."

"Joakajain was very suspicious and full of vicious misinformation about the plans of the Americans," said Carsden, patiently sparring for some way out of the network of Moro intrigue that he saw slowly entwining itself about his mission. "It is my hope to clear all that poison from the minds of the Moro chiefs if they will hear me patiently at their meeting."

The dato laughed again, sneeringly.

"But our mandarins and *panditas* would not believe the word of a Christian," he said. "Not even if they could sit with such at council, in the eyes of Allah. You see, Joakajain has no faith in Christians. He is for war if I but say the word; for sweeping upon Jolo with an army of *juramentados.* But Joakajain knows little and is without great firmness. Even Hadji would impose his craft upon Joakajain were it not for the prudent counsel of Majahnke."

"I can only hope, then," Carsden countered, "to impose upon your further good offices and your interest in the welfare of your people, señor."

"That shall be for you to say, *amigo mio,"* Majahnke responded. The dato leaned very close and Carsden caught the sinister transition in the other's face. It was darker, hawklike, with an ominous glint in the contracted eyes. Majahnke's placid features had become suddenly those of an untempered Moro barbarian. "If señor wishes my services at their worth," he added in a cutting whisper, "he will decide on the seventh day of the moon Shabaan—which is the day after tomorrow. Otherwise—" Majahnke broke off with a shrug of his shoulders.

GREAT care was taken by Majahnke for his guest's protection on the trip back to Ahka. The mandarin of the *barrio* was put in charge of the bodyguard of Moro lancers who formed about Carsden as he mounted the native pony. The dato escorted him to his mount, his mood again friendly and courteous, and wished him comfort for the night. The sun had sunk along since and the jungle was plunged in sticky blackness through which the lieutenant's escort led him as easily as if the way had been lighted by the sun. Not until he had climbed safely up into his nipa hut did the escort turn back. Carsden lighted a tallow candle. A deep pile of fiber mats had been laid out for his bed. But though his body ached in weariness after the arduous day of adventure, he took up a nervous pacing of the springy bamboo floor. Sleep was not to be thought of until he had made an analysis of the day's swift developments, estimated the situation, and made such plans as were possible to carry out his mission.

One thing he set down as certain. Success of his mission rested in the hands of Majahnke and that wily dato intended to make the most of his cards. In some way he must win Majahnke's support or, failing in that, he must by some miracle circumvent Majahnke's power to draw the others into open support of his mad ambition. Failing in that alternative, his only course would be to stall off a decision of the chiefs and priests while he returned to Jolo to report the dangerous situation to the American high commander. Which of these courses he must pursue, and how, would depend on the developments, he concluded finally. With this decision he blew out the candle and sank gratefully into his Moro bed.

CARSDEN awakened with a start. There was an unmistakable vibration in the nipa hut as of someone stealthily climbing up the bamboo ladder to the room where he lay. The movement ceased and he listened for the wind, but the dry cogon overhead told him the air was dead. He felt an uncanny fear pass over him as the structure swayed again.

"What is it!" he called out sharply.

"It's me, sir," came back the voice of O'Hara in little more than a hoarse whisper. "I've got to speak with the L'tenant."

He arose with sigh of relief, lighted the candle and glanced at his watch. It was three o'clock. O'Hara's figure rose into the room, his face grim, drawn and wide eyed.

"What's the meaning of routing me out of my sleep in the middle of the night, O'Hara?" Carsden demanded.

"Sh-h-h!" O'Hara cautioned, a warning finger on his lips. "Not so much noise please, sir. Sure and there's merry hell raisin' up in the distance and movin' this way like a typhoon, sir."

"What do you mean, Sergeant?" Carsden asked, lowering his voice. "Things seemed quiet enough everywhere when I turned in. What is it?"

"So is a heathen typhoon quiet enough till it hits you all of a sudden, sir. And that's what's blowin' up."

"You mean we're in immediate danger of trouble of some kind, O'Hara?" Lieutenant Carsden retained his calm demeanor.

"Not tonight, sir. No, sir. But there's sure danger. Sure and I'm sorry the L'tenant is in this mess here."

"Tell me what it's all about—who—what?"

"It's that Dato Majahnke, sir. That bird's gone clear *juramentado* with crazy ideas. And he's out to rule or ruin."

"I fear, O'Hara, you are only telling me something I knew quite well when I went to bed for a much needed sleep."

"No, sir, the L'tenant couldn't of knowed what I know, sir. Or maybe the L'tenant wouldn't of been sleepy."

"Tell me, then, what it is you've learned, O'Hara."

"Ten minutes after the L'tenant was out of me hut this afternoon, sir, something hit me right between the eyes. It was, where the major found out about me trouble with Fernandez. Sure and there was only one human bein' in the world I ever told about that—and it was Majahnke. He was that fine to me when I come here, sir, I got to tellin' him how glad I was to get out of Jolo after me trouble with the Spaniard. I told him the whole thing, includin' what the L'tenant knew . . . Who'd ever thought there was any connection between them two? But figure it out for yourself, sir."

"That's valuable information—for future use," Carsden said with a setting of his jaws. "But what is it brought you here at this hour?"

"That was the beginnin', sir. Thinks I, anybody what's mixed in with Fernandez must be a snake of some kind. So when I see the L'tenant ride off with Majahnke, I gets Pailo to follow along and see what happens. And she sure got a earful, sir, hidin' out under Majahnke's shanty while the L'tenant was up there for supper."

"You mean she heard our pleasant little after-dinner talk?"

"I don't know nothing about that, sir. It was what happened after the L'tenant left, she told me about. And that dato's sure got the Moro hay knife out for the L'tenant's throat. Sure and the L'tenant's life ain't worth a dobie dollar unless he jumps out of this hole—and jumps out quick before it's sunup."

"But see here, O'Hara." Carsden's face showed incredulity. "Let's not take this too fast. If Majahnke's pet ambition is to try out his favorite kris on my neck, why did he shoot one of his own people this afternoon to save my life? I did not give you the details, but if it hadn't been for the dato——"

"Pailo got the inside on that, too, sir. Sure and it was all a dirty frame-up, part of the game that ugly snake is playin'. Majahnke was watchin' on the trail for the L'tenant. He knew it the day you left Jolo. Some of Fernandez' fine work. And that Moro he shot was a poor devil he'd sicked on to the L'tenant himself by calling you a dangerous Christian pig. It didn't happen just like he thought it would. Majahnke thought Toulawei's musket would nick that lad with the hay knife. Then mister dato was goin' to arrest Toulawei in order to have him out of the way, take his gun, and put you in a way where you'd listen to reason when Majahnke asked you for what he wanted."

Carsden looked at his sergeant for some moments searchingly.

"O'Hara, this is a mighty serious matter. Are you sure you haven't been fed a lot of wild rumor off the grapevine? For us to act on your information, unless it's accurate, would be fatal. Can't you see that?"

"Yes, sir. But there ain't no question, sir. Pailo heard it all and come back scared like she's seen a jungle ghost. I got it from her straight, sir. • Majahnke was talkin' in Moro lingo to a band of his cutthroats, sir. And they was talkin' that loud and free Pailo got every last word. I been goin' over it word by word for the last two hours to make sure she wasn't a bit excited. And, sir, she's givin' it to us straight."

"Did you get the dato's sweet little plans for my demise?"

"I was just comin' to that, sir. They're figurin' the L'tenant will come around to their way of thinkin' and sign up to put the skids under the Sultan at Maibun. Pailo guesses that's who they mean, but the only name they give was 'that pig Hadgy' or some such name. If the L'tenant don't come across—which I know he wouldn't—then Majahnke is goin' to the meetin' of Moro chiefs, stir 'em up like a bunch of hornets—and go after what he wants with his Moslems, sir. Why he's even crazy enough to figure he can chase the whole Jolo garrison into the Sulu Sea, just because he's got ten fightin' men to our one. The only hitch, sir, is that other dato who is senior dato and a bit weak-kneed on the idea—but Majahnke thinks he'll light up like gunpowder when they begin shoutin' 'Christian!' "

THE officer turned away to pace the narrow room uneasily. There was no longer any question but that mischief was in the air, and that O'Hara's mestiza had gotten to the bottom of the situation. O'Hara's story fitted in only too ominously with Carsden's own fragmentary information and deductions. His face was drawn and haggard under the dull light of the single candle as he reckoned with the peril to his mission. The peace of the Island was threatened by the lust for jungle power of the conniving Majahnke, his imagination fired by the part of him that was Spanish, a fanatical savagery held lightly in leash by the part that was Moro. Carsden's whole nature cried out for the crash of muskets in meeting this crisis. But his elders had decreed that his mission was one of peace. It would only amount to abject failure, therefore, if he fled to Jolo and called for troops to answer Majahnke's madness. A plan began forming in his mind as he walked lightly back and forth across the nipa hut. O'Hara broke in upon him nervously.

"Sir, there's nothin' to it but get out of here while it's dark," he warned the officer. "The L'tenant'll have no chance once the sun comes up."

"O'Hara, there's only one way to this thing," said Carsden as if he had not heard the sergeant's words. "We've got to be at that powwow and we've got to pour water on that wildman's firebrand. Since they'll not let me in because I'm a Christian, you'll go in my place. I'll coach you on just what to say. I don't believe Joakajain will fall for the bloody mess he's being led into if he's put right on the facts and sees the game in its right light. After all, it's a lucky thing just now that you're a son of Allah and can talk to these datos at their council with some chance of being heard."

"But, sir," O'Hara protested almost tearfully, "it might turn out O. K. for Sergeant O'Hara but it's takin' too big a risk with the L'tenant's life. Sure, sir, and we got everything ready. We paints the L'tenant with coconut oil, dresses him in a Moro outfit and gets out hell bent down the trail for Maibun 'fore it's light, sir. Pailo knows the way in the dark and can steer us through without——"

"O'Hara!" Carsden's boyish face showed firm determination as he cut in sharply. "Is it your opinion of me that I'd run in the face of a little danger and desert my military mission?"

"No, sir, never that, sir," O'Hara responded apologetically. "But I wasn't wantin' the L'tenant made into mincemeat, sir, when there don't look like any chance of nothin' else."

"That's what I'm in the service for, O'Hara—to take such chances as may be necessary in the performance of duty. I've been sent here on a definite mission, and I'm going through with it. I'm going to fight that oily rascal, Majahnke, through to the end of the game. However, you have my permission to start back for Jolo immediately if you wish."

"Sir!" O'Hara became rigid and his eyes flashed with sudden passion. "With all due respect to the L'tenant's rank, that last statement was a insult to me honor as a soldier!"

"Then I'm sorry, Sergeant O'Hara. I most humbly apologize."

"Thank you, sir."

## VIII

THE red menace of jungle intrigue did not turn the weary Carsden from thoughts of sleep. As Sergeant O'Hara disappeared through the floor of the nipa hut with the cautious silence of a fading shadow, Carsden turned in unshaken composure and snuffed the candle flame between his fingers. Forcing aside all thoughts of the morrow in the knowledge that he must be fit and alert for the day's developments, he fell quickly asleep.

He awakened slowly to a sense of stifling heat and opened his eyes to find that the morning sun was high enough in the heavens to beat down fiercely upon his sleeping room. He got up without haste, dressed with leisurely deliberation and stretched himself. An understanding smile lit up his face as a group of Moro servants appeared almost immediately with his breakfast. He guessed that they had sensed his awakening by the slight vibrations of the hut. The incident disclosed to him the hidden alertness with which his every movement was being observed.

His hosts made no distinction between breakfast and dinner. A veritable banquet was served him; food enough for a hungry squad. After he had eaten heartily he proceeded out into the open in the leisurely manner of one who is at peace with the world and harbors no forebodings. The village was free of commotion. Women were busy weaving fiber into mats and apparel. Such few men as were to be seen lolled about in lazy indolence. Swarms of naked children splashed joyously in the sluggish stream. The whole village breathed of a peaceful serenity.

Strolling back and forth along the single street as if without plan or direction, Carsden brought up finally at the nipa hut of Joakajain. It was with the elder dato, he had quickly concluded, that he must deal in snatching the firebrand from Majahnke's hand before that conniving dato could apply it to the powder keg of Moro passions. His first move would be to seek Joakajain's sanction to attend the impending council. Failing in that, he would demand the right of O'Hara to sit in and speak for the American garrison at Jolo.

Joakajain received him with the same stolid, suspicious manner he had exhibited on the day before. The dato's eyes narrowed and he shook his head in sullen negation when Carsden presented the virtue of his claim to a place at the council table.

"But are not my people equally interested with yours?" Carsden persisted stoutly. "How are your chiefs to know of our peaceful intentions and our desire to help the Moros if you close their ears to what we have to say!"

"We will repeat to them what you have told us," replied Joakajain, his own unfriendly muttering translated into polite English by the interpreter.

"There are sure to come up many points of dispute at such a meeting," Carsden argued. "Failure to give us a voice might result in serious trouble which we all want to avoid. It is for the good of all that I demand my right to be present!"

Joakajain was unmoved by this appeal.

"The gathering is of our own people," he responded.

"Might it not be," Carsden boldly warned him, "that there is among your chiefs one who is bent on mischief to gain his own end at the expense of his people?"

The elder's face gathered in a quick, suspicious scowl. Carsden saw with a quickening pulse that the passion was not of resentment against the words of warning. Rather, he had touched at last upon a sensitive point in Majahnke's mad scheme—the suspicious fears of his brother dato. But Joakajain shortly regained his composure and sat down.

"You are a Christian," he grunted, as if that had turned the balance and settled all doubts. "We may trust our own people."

"Surely, it is no offense for your chiefs to listen to a Christian when he comes with friendly word from a people who want to help you," Carsden argued.

"I have spoken," retorted Joakajain, taking refuge in arbitrary authority.

Carsden played his last card, decisively, in the manner of a man who will not be refused.

"Then Señor O'Hara will sit in my stead," he exclaimed. "He will speak for the Americans and give the lie to any treachery that may be brought up."

For several moments, Joakajain sat unmoved, debating this proposal. Carsden thought he could follow the play of the dato's mind in his shifting features. The scowl lifted. His face brightened and his whole manner cleared as he toyed with the thought of an American representative at the meeting. His demeanor made it clear that he had fears for the meeting of chiefs, that he was not dead to his brother dato's intrigue. Carsden sensed his answer before he spoke.

"Señor O'Hara shall sit among us and speak for your people," he announced solemnly.

"It is so agreed," rejoined Carsden in prompt acceptance of the pledge. "You have spoken with deep wisdom, señor, if it is our good will the Moro people wish to hold."

He saluted impressively, holding the gesture until Joakajain nodded a response, then turned on his heel, intent upon the next move in the game against Majahnke. He must spend the remaining hours coaching O'Hara for the test of wits. But as he bent over to let himself down through the hole in the floor he found himself looking into the gloating features of Majahnke who had mounted the ladder with catlike stealth.

"One moment, Señor Lieutenant," smiled Majahnke tauntingly as he made his way through the aperture. "So señor breaks faith so soon?" the dato accused him. "He uses treachery when he thinks my back is turned?"

"I had no such idea," said Carsden dryly, holding his temper in check. "It was natural for me to press our right to be heard at the meeting of your chiefs."

"You heard from me the terms," sneered Majahnke. "As I have said you will accept my terms or—well, I shall save my precious ammunition rather than waste it on you another time."

"I take it our proposals are something for all your chiefs to decide," Carsden affirmed. "After all, we will not be without a voice to offer peace. Dato Joakajain has pledged his word to that."

The younger dato laughed.

"When I explain to my brother your Christian deception, he will attend to that. You know without my reminding you that your soldier O'Hara is without authority to speak for the Americans."

Before Carsden could speak, Majahnke launched into a fervent harangue in Moro. Joakajain's face darkened again and with a sharp look at the American, he turned back to Majahnke and nodded assent.

"I will not ask that he punish you for your treachery," said Majahnke, "but my brother Joakajain is much put out at your conduct and agrees with me that O'Hara shall not sit among us."

The lieutenant faced the other's triumph with an attempt at jauntiness that did not wholly conceal his ebbing spirits.

"Then if we are to have no voice, I take it I waste my time remaining here for the council," he said.

"If you scorn my terms," Majahnke threatened, "you are not free to carry word to the pig Hadji whose credentials you carry."

"Am I to understand from that I'm a prisoner here!" Carsden demanded.

"The trails are open," leered Majahnke. "But I would not advise the Señor Lieutenant to travel them—unarmed. It might not be his good fortune to have Majahnke near to protect him another time. Besides, it is easy for the señor to have an escort and return with great success—if he will but say the word."

"Ah, *amigo mio!* If the American will

"You wouldn't expect me to give my word on something I couldn't deliver even if I wanted to?" the lieutenant parried. attach his name to the treaty with Majahnke, I will risk its value. If the Señor Lieutenant has no such power why does he come among us?"

"Well, I'll think it over a bit," Carsden avoided the issue, sparring for time.

"In the meantime," Majahnke warned him, "I would suggest that the Señor Lieutenant remain here in Ahka, as he values his Christian soul, and not try again at treachery while I am among my *barrios* preparing the minds of my mandarins for the council of our people. *Adios amigo mio. Hasta mañana.*"

AS MAJAHNKE and his coterie of barelegged cutthroats went pattering out of the village, Lieutenant Carsden went direct to the nipa hut of Sergeant O'Hara. Before entering, he paced back and forth, struggling with the desperate problem that confronted him. There was but one ready avenue of escape. That was to sign such a treaty as Majahnke presented, pretend to favor the fellow openly for the Sulu throne and accept safe escort back to Jolo. Once there, the scrap of paper would be promptly repudiated, and since Majahnke was bent on trouble, the American garrison could give him his fill.

Such a plan grew upon him as the only certain way out. It palled upon him just as quickly as he remembered how far it differed from the mission upon which he had been sent. After all, if he signed such a treaty, its repudiation could only feed the latent fires of suspicion and distrust in the jungles. It might neutralize the friendly influence of the Sultan Hadji. It might cause more harm, he told himself grimly, than the value of his life justified. Dismissing thoughts of escape from his peril, he climbed resolutely into O'Hara's hut.

"We're barred, O'Hara," he informed the sergeant. "We are to have no voice. That snake Majahnke neatly outfoxed me. The way it sounded to me, all he had to do was call me a Christian liar, and that turned the trick. These Spanish certainly left Christians with a fine reputation in these parts."

"We got all tonight to get out in, sir," replied O'Hara eagerly.

"There's no chance of that, now. Majahnke warned me to keep off the trails—and I'm willing to take him at his word. If I've got to die, it's going to be in line of duty, so they can hang the act right on the neck of Majahnke and his pack of wolves."

"But what we goin' to do, sir, and us unarmed!"

"We've got one hole card," Carsden muttered. "I'm not sure I wouldn't rather have my neck carved than play it. But then I've got my mission to think of, and there's a saying 'everything's fair in love and war'."

"If it's anything I can help you on, sir," said O'Hara stoutly, "count me in on the killin', sir, no matter what it is."

"You can help, O'Hara," Lieutenant Carsden reflected. "In fact, I've got to depend on you to start things off."

"Sure and anything the L'tenant says will give me joy to die a-tryin' at it, sir."

Instead of giving the sergeant further information at once, Carsden began a somber pacing of the floor as he reckoned with the fantastic plan that had presented itself before his goaded mind. The idea alternately repulsed and beckoned to him as he reckoned first with its repellent conditions and then with its alluring promise of success.

"I have discovered to my own satisfaction," Carsden spoke up presently, "that Joakajain is suspicious of Majahnke. If I can read faces at all, he's pretty nervous about having trouble with the Sultan and the Americans all at one time. I was making excellent progress with him when Majahnke called me a black Christian—and that upset the whole thing, O'Hara."

"Yes, sir, sure and it's a fightin' word among 'em as I've told the L'tenant before."

"I've got another idea that Joakajain would like nothing better than to have an American representative at the big powwow tomorrow so Majahnke can't put his propaganda over to suit himself. He agreed to seat you, O'Hara, until that snake came along and hissed in his ear that you are not the authorized representative."

"I'm puttin' nothin' past that reptile, sir. And to think I let him take me into camp with his oily tongue when I first came!"

"But just where would Majahnke get off if an authorized American representative showed up with Joakajain, wearing a nice red turban and all oiled and slicked up by the *panditas*, O'Hara?"

"It's a pity there ain't no such animal, sir. Besides, we couldn't get word to Jolo in time even if we had one."

"How long does it take to get sprinkled with Moro holy water and just how do you go about it, O'Hara?"

The sergeant eyed his commander sharply.

"What is it the L'tenant's drivin' at?" he gasped.

"Exactly what you're suspecting," said Carsden. "I'm a superstitious man if not a religious one. I've got scruples against trifling with any man's religion, even a heathen's. But, by God, everything I've got belongs to the service, and since there isn't any other way out of this mess, I'm going to head off that yellow hearted hyena if I have to become a Mohammedan, a Buddist, a Jew and a Presbyterian—all rolled into one!"

"Is the L'tenant speakin' in earnest, sir?" stammered O'Hara.

"Never more so, O'Hara. If Joakajain will let me in, and it can be done right away, I'm going to join your measly church—and may the Lord have mercy on my soul!"

"It doesn't take no longer than gettin' a tooth filled by a dentist, sir," exclaimed O'Hara excitedly, "and it's about as pleasin' on the nerves, with a bunch of heathens beatin' tomtoms, howlin' out of the Koran and pourin' smelly oil on you, sir. Sure and I'll go over to the dato's on the run if the L'tenant says the word, sir."

At the officer's word of assent, Sergeant O'Hara was out of the nipa hut in two powerful bounds that nearly shook the frail structure from its moorings. Carsden walked the floor feverishly while the sergeant was gone. He had played his last desperate trump. If Joakajain refused his mad plan, his mission was hopeless and, with O'Hara, he was doomed to sit helplessly by while the tightening net of jungle intrigue slowly strangled them. His heart beat violently as he heard the patter of swift feet outside bearing the verdict towards him. O'Hara fairly leaped into the hut, his face alight with excited joy.

"Sure and it's all fixed, sir. Joakajain was the tickledest heathen you ever laid eyes on when I broke the news of what the L'tenant wanted, sir. He's all waitin' for you soon's you can manage to arrive on the job."

## IX

MORO chieftains from the length and breadth of the *pueblas* faced to Mecca in greeting the rising sun next morning. They came with their little groups of retainers, gaudily dressed in their brightest turbans and gold and silver ornaments, flashing krises in their broad sashes. All assembled in the shadows of a great palm grove near the edge of Ahka. Mandarins of the *barrios* squatted in a large circle with their henchmen clustered close behind them, handy with brass and silver betelnut boxes, bamboo water carriers, fresh fruits and viands to regale them through the long, tedious parley.

In the center of the group stood Majahnke, resplendent in broadcloth and silver buttons. His sash was of gold cloth and his finest serpentine kris flashed with silver scrolls that had been fashioned into the unsheathed blade. Majahnke showed neither surprise nor outward resentment when the American joined the group with Joakajain. As Carsden took his place on the ground just inside the circle of village chiefs, Majahnke sauntered over to him and smiled ironically.

"So the Señor Lieutenant decided upon treachery again?" he said quietly. "Presently you shall taste of Majahnke's sweet revenge; and for you the taste shall be very bitter, Señor Lieutenant."

"I am here with the sanction of the Dato Joakajain," replied Carsden crisply. "I have no quarrel with you or any of your people, Majahnke. I am only performing my duty."

"We shall see if the eyes of Allah are to be deceived by a traitor in false colors," the dato sneered. "But, before it is too late, I now give you your last chance to sign the treaty I have prepared."

"I am not here to sign," said Carsden coolly. He added with a cold, hard return of Majahnke's threatening look: "It might be well for you to remember the words of Hadji: that Americans are like a box of matches. If anything happens to me, all the jungles of Sulu are not large enough to give shelter to those responsible."

"Your soldiers fight only with oily tongues," Majahnke laughed. "As for what is to become of you today . . . *Poco se me importa. Adios, señor.*"

BARBARIC ceremony opened the Moro council, the beating of python skins drawn into drumheads across bamboo, chanting of weird rites from the Koran, and finally a spear dance with its grimacing warriors advancing upon each other with lance and wooden shield in homage to the jungle god of combat. At the end of these pagan ceremonies, Joakajain, the older dato, raised his hand and began talking in a staccato, singsong outpouring to which the assembled chiefs listened in stolid silence. When Joakajain had finished, Majahnke arose and, in a voice more potent and stirring, launched into a harangue, the purport of which Carsden could not even surmise until he saw the glowering eyes of the chiefs turning upon him from time to time. There was a stirring of restlessness among the chiefs as Majahnke spoke, which left little doubt in Carsden's mind as to the subject of the dato's words.

"Sure and the snake's stirrin' up the animals ag'in the L'tenant," muttered O'Hara who had taken his seat immediately behind the officer. "It's as plain as if I could make out every word of what he's sayin', sir."

A moment later Joakajain stepped forward and raised his hand in interruption. Majahnke broke off promptly and bowed with the cool deference of one who feels himself master of the situation. Joakajain addressed the interpreter who turned to Carsden.

"The Señor Lieutenant," repeated the interpreter, "is to speak for himself whether it is true he wears the turban of Mohammed over a Christian heart."

Carsden got slowly to his feet and looked with calm deliberation around the tense circle. He formed his answer slowly, coolly, in the knowledge that upon his reply might depend not only his safety but the success of his mission.

"I have shown my good faith," he replied. "If the Moros wish to live in peace with the Americans, are you to challenge our good faith when we bow at your mosques?"

He stood looking from one to the other, unshaken by the play of Majahnke's fire upon the powder of Moro passion, almost defiant as he faced them. His manner as well as his words must have convinced them. The tension broke. Glaring eyes relaxed. The crisis passed on. Joakajain raised his arm again and spoke a few words.

Then Majahnke suddenly threw off all restraint and opened wide the rift that had appeared between the two datos. He leaped to his feet and launched into a fiery outburst, plainly goaded to a fury by the rejection of his charges against the American. He waved aside Joakajain's effort to silence him and quickly fanned the flames to white heat. Carsden was not left long in doubt as to the nature of this new attack upon him. Majahnke broke off and came bristling over to him, his eyes afire, his face twisted in a grimace of hate.

"Allah shall decide, Señor Lieutenant!" he shouted. "Majahnke is not to be beaten by your treachery and the weakness of Joakajain! I have called upon Allah to show my people your Christian heart—and you dare not refuse!"

"If you will explain what it is you're talking about, perhaps I can answer you," replied Carsden quietly, ignoring the other's blind passion.

"Allah is to show my people," Majahnke reiterated. "You shall defend your vile pretences with your Christian life."

Carsden blinked rapidly as he caught Majahnke's meaning but he gave no other indication of concern.

"Señor Majahnke well knows that I am here unarmed on a mission of peace," he replied.

"Ah, but I did not intend that you fight without arms," Majahnke snarled. "Since Joakajain has brought you here, he has agreed that you shall use his blade. Or there are a dozen others from which you may make your choice of a kris!"

"My mission does not permit me to engage in a public brawl with a Moro dato before his people," said Carsden.

Majahnke bared his white teeth in a malignant grin.

"So Señor Lieutenant confirms what I have said: that your soldiers fight with oily tongues. Well, you shall see how my people look upon a sneaking jackal that will not stand and fight. I shall show them."

The dato leaned close to Lieutenant Carsden and spat full in his face. Carsden lost control of himself with the volatile suddenness of an exploding shell. In a split fraction of a second he had ceased to be a uniformed diplomat on a sensitive mission of peace. His hand shot out impulsively, driven by the swift violence of his pent-up emotions. The blow caught the dato on the jaw and sent him sprawling to the ground.

"I'll fight you," Carsden shouted, his face livid as he stood over the prostrate Majahnke. "I'll fight you, you pig half-breed, here and now, with any weapon you want to name!"

The staggering blow had the effect of sobering Majahnke. He climbed to his feet rubbing his jaw, now more dazed than infuriated by the mysterious assault that had shaken his senses and piled him up half unconscious on the ground. It was clear that the others were equally puzzled by the force of the blow, being strangers to the American form of physical attack. When Majahnke's head cleared, his features twisted into a vindictive grin, and he flashed his pearl handled kris from his sash and tested its edges with an exaggerated air of expertness. Joakajain stepped forward and handed a long serpentine kris to Carsden.

"Sir, can't the L'tenant make it pistols?" spoke up Sergeant O'Hara, from whose face the color had faded at the danger confronting Carsden. "Sure them snakes is murder with a kris, sir. A white man ain't got a chance. And that skunk knows he's got you foul."

"There is no use haggling with him," replied Carsden. The storm within him had spent himself and he was now cool and collected. He swung the keen, wavy kris back and forth in the air, thrusting and cutting to test the hang of the blade and the feel of the grip. "This thing is a bit awkward, O'Hara, but if that rat thinks the blade is a lost art among white men, he's riding to a surprise. I've had my turns at swordsmanship. And at least this will be a two sided fight unless he's got some tricks all his own."

THE opponents faced each other with their blades at guard. The Moro chiefs returned to their circle, their retainers hugging close to the magic ring in wide eyed excitement. Majahnke's mood had changed again, as he came forward, to one of nonchalance. He held his blade forward listlessly. Carsden was not tricked by the ruse. As Majahnke flashed into a swift fury of cuts and thrusts seeking to overwhelm the American with a sudden surprise attack, Carsden parried adeptly.

Finding that the lieutenant was not a stranger to steel, the dato settled down to a mere leisurely feeling out of technique while he sought the other's vulnerable points in attack and defense. After he had twice failed at a trick of forcing Carsden's blade from his grip he began deft, short thrusts from a distance, in the apparent hope of cutting his opponent's fighting hand under the uncovered hilt.

Carsden quickly detected this danger, after a narrow escape from the loss of several fingers, and took care to protect his uncovered hand.

A malignant, cocksure grimace that had flashed into the dato's face with his initial surprise attack, presently faded as the clashing of blades went on relentlessly. The coolness of the American seemed to taunt the Moro as Carsden moved lightly about, parrying but seldom thrusting or cutting in return. Carsden was fighting a defensive battle. He had decided upon his plan of combat. There could be no taking of chances, he decided. Something more than his life was at stake. His mission. Upon the outcome might depend the peace of the jungles. Certainly O'Hara's life as well as his own.

He detected that Majahnke's attacks waned in fury and frequency. It was for that he was waiting. In time the dato's fighting arm would lose its vitality. Majahnke already was resting his wrist by long periods of cautious fencing with light pressure on his blade. He felt that his own endurance would outlast that of the dato. The inch-long nail on the dato's little finger, symbol of his station and freedom from debasing toil, was to Carsden likewise a token of flabby sinews. When the pain in his own swelling right wrist became intolerable, his turn at attack would come. A deft shift of the kris from his right to his left hand, a trick of his old Army training days, and he would hold the advantage.

Majahnke began to press him again at a time when Carsden had estimated the dato must be husbanding the waning strength of his fighting arm. He cut, thrust and lunged alternately with quickened animation and at the same time began a running fire of insulting comment, evidently with the plan of stirring the officer to rage.

"Soon," panted Majahnke at the climax of his tirade, now threatening Carsden with the most terrible fate conceivable to the Moro mind, "soon you shall lie—in the ground—with the body—of a pig—to damn you forever!"

Carsden was nettled by his antagonist's sudden vitality. But, from the pain of his own wrist, he reasoned that it must be a ruse. He was preparing for his own coup, his own right hand now nearly useless, when Majahnke danced back several paces and with a mocking laugh shifted his kris to his left hand.

Before Carsden could shift his own blade, the ambidextrous Majahnke was upon him in a savage fury of cuts and thrusts. When these failed the dato leaped in close, his blade pressed against Carsden's weapon in a desperate attempt to wrest it from his numb fingers. As their bodies came close, Carsden saw the look of triumph on Majahnke's distorted face and felt his own grip yielding slowly. He clung on desperately but the strength of the other's arm was too great for his jaded fighting hand.

Instictively, at a moment when fear of being left disarmed and at the dato's cold mercy was chilling his veins, Carsden's clenched left hand shot out. A short, violent jab that landed fairly in the pit of the dato's unprotected stomach. With an astounded grunt of pain, Majahnke half doubled and for an instant relaxed the pressure of his blade as he clutched at his stomach. With the swiftness of a boxer, Carsden side-stepped and brought the full force of his kris across the dato's neck and jaw.

Majahnke pitched forward with a howl of pain and lay floundering on the ground. His personal retainers rushed up and after binding up the gaping wound with his sash, carried him slowly away on a human litter formed by joining their hands under his limp body.

The victor followed the procession with his eyes until his vanquished foeman was lost in the palms and bamboo. Then he turned about slowly to the staring mandarins and raised his kris at arm's length above his head.

"It has been as Majahnke proposed," he announced. "You have seen with your own eyes. Allah has decided!"

## X

THE commander of Jolo reached eagerly for the sheet of paper with which his adjutant came hurrying into the room. For an hour he had waited while an interpreter reduced to English the document in Arabic which Lieutenant Carsden had submitted from the dato Joakajain. Carsden himself had shown no apprehension as to what the message might contain. Neither had he offered any rosy picture that it might be everything he had hoped to bring back. The translation must speak for itself, he maintained cautiously.

The colonel's face brightened as he read. He gave an exclamation of satisfaction as he reached the bottom of the page, then read it over again with characteristic military thoroughness and beamed as he handed it to the young officer. Carsden's face wreathed in a smile of satisfaction as the page confirmed the fullest success of his mission. It read:

> THIS MESSAGE FROM YOUR BROTHER THE DATO JOAKAJAIN TO MY BROTHER THE AMERICAN COMMANDER AT TIANGY:
>
> I beg to send my greetings to our brothers. I have from the Señor Lieutenant the message of His Highness the Sultan and I share with him the wish of our people for peace and good will with our brothers at Tiangy. May we become close friends and good brothers forever; which is also the wish of my people. I am agreed that if noise of troubles reach our ears we will come to you for council. Written this eighth day of the moon Shaaban in the year 1316.

"There is only one point in your verbal report that is not altogether clear to me, Carsden," said the colonel. "You spoke of that other dato, Majahnke, losing out at the powwow; but you didn't say how or why. Our information was that he was quite a fellow among the Moros in his own home town."

"He cut quite a swath at first, sir," Carsden explained evasively in a tone that suggested the incident was not one of great importance. "But the fact is, he pinned too much faith in Allah and Allah turned him down—which settled his hash at the council."

"But what happened, Carsden?"

"Sir, he got mixed up in some sort of a religious row with another Mohammedan who was lucky enough to sink a kris in his carcass."

"It may be," reflected the post commander, "that it was a lucky thing for you it happened that way. But laying aside any matters of luck, Carsden, I feel that you did a commendable piece of work. I'm only sorry, in view of the importance of your success, that a grateful republic doesn't provide some more substantial rewards for its military servants than mere thanks."

"The commendation of my commanding officer is reward enough for any small services I may have performed, sir," said Carsden earnestly. "I wish to thank you, sir."

"That will be all, Carsden," the colonel dismissed him. "Report back to your battalion. And if we need a good man to send out another time I'll know where to find one."

HE FOUND his battalion commander in precisely the same mood in which he had left him. It was a trait of the major's to take up any unfinished business at the point where it had been laid off.

"I'm glad to see you're back, Carsden, from wherever you've been and whatever you've been doing," said Major Page. "Are you ready to answer my questions regarding O'Hara's wild conduct, or shall I swear you and take your statement under official oath?"

"Sir, that might be difficult," smiled Lieutenant Carsden, "unless the major has a copy of the Koran handy to take the place of a Bible in administering the oath."

"What impertinence are you about now, Carsden!" Major Page demanded. "I'm inclined to suspect that headquarters has swelled your head so you think you can temporize with me. Now come to your senses. Fernandez has been good enough to keep his story away from the colonel until I had a chance to get at you again."

"Señor Fernandez is scheduled for an interview with the colonel, sir, just as soon as his whereabouts can be located," said Carsden.

The major blanched.

"You mean the C. O. has got wind of this Fernandez rumpus?"

"Yes, sir," Carsden affirmed, smiling again. "He's got wind of the fact that Fernandez is an oily mischief maker, a spy, a fomenter of trouble among the natives and a general all around nuisance who deserves hanging—and may get what he deserves. So you see, Fernandez will be too busy with his own affairs ever to give Sergeant O'Hara's another thought."

THE shimmering sun glided swiftly down into the multicolored horizon. Carsden sat again on the veranda of the old Spanish club at Jolo, his eyes far out across the billowing azure of the

Sulu Sea. The miracle of the Sulu sunset crested the waves with its lavish riot of color. Soothing breezes stirred the trees to flaming glory and whispered to Carsden of mystery and strange adventure behind the palm cloaked shores of the Sulu Archipelago. He smiled serenely, in understanding faith. As the ball of fire sank from sight and plunged Jolo into black shadows, his eyes lifted beyond the void. He saw, now, box elders and poplars and hardy pine and fir. Trim hedges replaced the littered jungle. There were houses that were not of bamboo, and great fields and friendly faces; and the maidens were fair of skin and did not wear coarse sarongs above squat, naked feet. He smiled again, wistfully. One day, when the jungles had yielded to gentler ways and his part of the task here was done. . . .

The hand of a *moso* on his shoulder snapped his reverie.

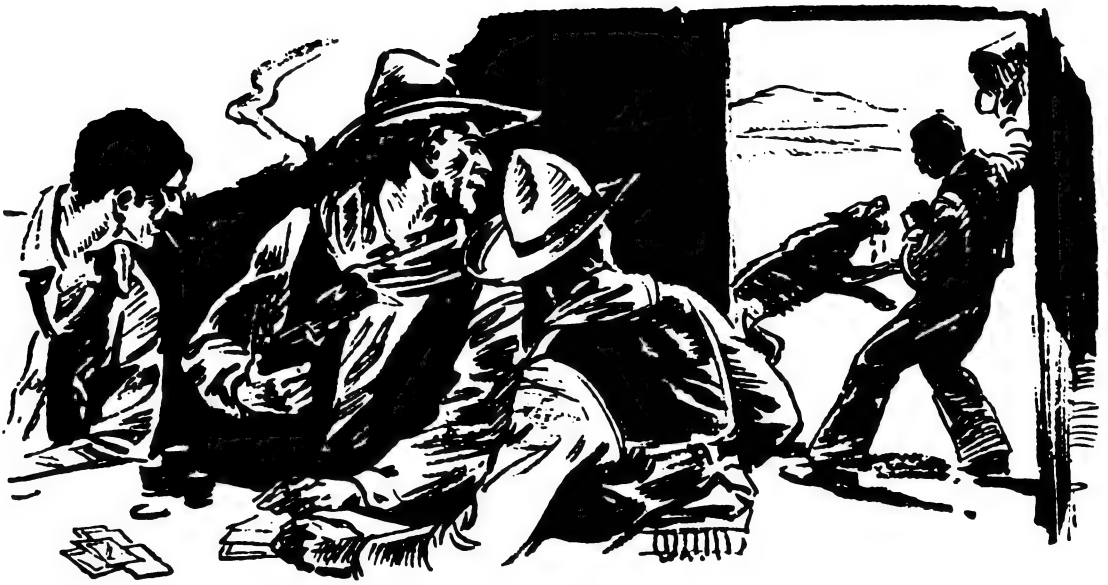
"A *soldado* wishes speech with the Señor Lieutenant," said the flunky in his painful English. Lieutenant Carsden drained his glass and went outside. It was Sergeant O'Hara who had asked for him.

"Sure, sir," said O'Hara, his face and voice torn by conflicting emotions, "sure, sir, and it's breakin' me heart to be leavin' the service. But there's reasons, sir, why I'm thinkin' I'll be takin' me leave on the next boat for discharge at the Presidio, if the L'tenant'll arrange it, sir."

"It'll be tough to lose a soldier like you, O'Hara," said Carsden. "But I know we can't expect to hold a good man in the ranks forever." The lieutenant smiled imperceptibly. "Of course you're leaving behind all local entanglements. So I'll not have any extra passage to provide for."

O'Hara squirmed uncomfortably.

"No, sir," he answered. "Mrs. O'Hara's the real reason I'm goin', sir. Sure, L'tenant, and there's reasons why I'm wantin' to have the knot tied all over again in somethin' bigger'n a grass covered mosque, by a reg'lar padre with shoes on his feet and a white collar around his neck, and a Holy Bible in his hand instead of a heathen prayer book, sir."



# SCIENTERIFIC

## *The Story of an Amazing Desert Experiment*

### By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

DID I ever tell you all about that feller who come to Skull Valley and settled in the old Pink Springs stage station? He was a tall, awf'ly narrow man, physically, passing six foot tall and so doggone straight he'd made a good arrow for Art Young to use trying for distance with his bows 'n' arrers. He had what they'd call a bunt tip for a head, shocking more'n penetrating, the way he'd hit anything if he was projected.

According to his cards, which he handed out whenever he met anybody, he was Perfessor Dules J. Burges, Ph.D.F, Univ. d. Philante. I ast him did his tastes run to geology, wildcraft, history or nature, and he said he was an experimental naturalist, department of vermin, and would I tell him where at he could find coyotes?

Coyotes! Huh! This was at that stage station. I'd come riding by dragging a long, new rope to take out the twists and kinks, and smooth off any stray toothpick splinters into the fibers, which I have learned to dislike from painful experience with new ropes, and if I wasn't too lazy I'd never use no manillers but always Nevada Jack rawhides with the stretch took out by numerous soakings of the thongs before plaiting them. Did I know where at there was any coyotes thehbouts?

I led him mysteriously down the roadway to the bend. We clumb the point of the slide rock and arrived at a small bench like a pulpit, about a hundred foot above the bend in the roadway, and he looked to the northward across the tule marsh. An' he swung around northwest and westerly, where theh's such vacancies as the mirage delights in, an' then to the southwest where it's broken lands.

An' then I headed his gaze nearly due southward along the flanks of that theh ridge we was on, a tumult of bare and desolate stones in all the geometrical angles and curves known to science.

"Theh!" I said. "Theh's where the coyotes hang out."

He looked at me kinda sorry and kinda mad. Did I think he was a danged idjit?

"Why," he remarked, "if they was any coyotes around I'd see 'em right now!"

Then I looked at him sorry, too.

"C'mon!" I said, and he was patient, following me.

I took him down to the levels of the salt and marsh. I pointed out to him tracks in the soft sand, where coyotes had walked along after coming out of the tule marsh. Their paws were naturally mudded. Betwixt their toes was sundry forms of alkali in salty compositions, some sticky, some stinging and biting, some inclined to lump and some inclined to be slick, or gritty—all tenacious. The sand would cut the dirt from the paws and scratch the itchiness. This hyar's a fine p'int in the habits of coyotes and loboes, which is often used to the sorrow and disaster of them same wild lupines, yes, sir! And there in the sand were innumerable tracks.

"Aint them dogs?" the perfessor of scienterifics inquired, and I said:

"Them is coyotes."

Well, sir, this Ph.D.F. dropped onto his hands and knees and squinted. He had a magnifying glass. He crept along in them tracks for upwards of half a mile, squinting, cocking his head like a rooster experimenting with each of his two eyes. And when this here perfessor riz to his tall and slender heights, he remarks to me:

"So them is coyote tracks, is they? I am delighted and surprised."

"Why surprised?" I inquired.

"In the primary place," I believe he said, "I observe that they walk in the sand to use the fractured edges of sand gravel for the purpose of drycleaning their paws of the humus with its saline contents which have cohered to their paws and balled up on their hairs."

Well, sir, I looked at him. Neveh in my life had it dawned on me that in addition to knowing book learning a college perfessor could also be observing and intelligent. It was my turn to be astonished and I took full advantage of the same for a considerable period of time. I suspect he knew what ailed me. He tucked one thumb, his left, into the armhole of his vest in a reg'lar he man gesture and swelled visibly. And so, discerning that he was to all appearances far from being a damned fool, I perceeded to take him up gulches and through cañons. I followed wild horse runways in the direction of Granite Mountang, and we circulated from Danites to Bearshebas in the investigations and preliminaries of this here person's undisclosed projects in our fair and open land.

Coyotes? Them, and nothing else. I tried to in'trust him in sheep, lands and buzzards. No, suh. He would have none of them. I entertained him not at all with the accounts of Butch Cassidy and Harvey Logan, and their Nemesis, which was Charley Siringo, the Wild Bunch and the greatest cowboy detective which ever rode from Denver to Alma and from the Mississippi to Milk River, and from Idaho to Venice, California. The perfessor sat glum amid the dire perils of brave men embattled. And I also showed him silver naked in the rock. I gathered up specimens of gold ore and showed him earth so green with copper that on or about the 14th of March the wind lifts it into swirls and the Desert Maidens dance away down the leeward in joyousness and appropriate color. In most deserts the harpies of the wind are yellow, but here were green whirlwinds—and he just looked enduring and patient.

As a last resource I introduced him to some of the purtiest girls that ever graced a dance hall and he entertained two of them with the record he had made as a Ph.D.F., having studied lupines, canines and vulpines, and them girls come around along toward morning and remarked to me that I had brung to them the champeen dog catcher whatever they had heard tell of. Course, being ladies, they had allowed him to pursue the specialty in which he was imbued and as I had heard the same feller, in his coyote limitations of interest, I sighed and give up.

He would eat watermelon, roast venison, Unitah trout, and the large and famous variety of produce for which the Bonneville Basin and adjacent regions is famous, but I seen him leave a restaurant, between soup and roast pork with sage dressing, to converse with a man who brought in a coyote hide tawed with salts and wrung dry, soft. He forgot his dinner in the restaurant and I let him.

COYOTES we had and he pumped me dry of their lore. Every word I said about other subjects he ignored, but when I told him of coyote pups, dogs and their female associates, he drawed his pencil and his notebook and he perceeded to record my words like they was croppings of leaf gold in a mountainous ore bed. And when I tried invention as well as facts he would detect the change in the tone of my voice, like a coyote detects the odor of a human hand, and regard me with suspicion and rebuking regrets. I tried long and ardently to persuade him to believe what was a bit stretched or which was slightly more in'trustin' than the plain truth about these here coyotes, but he refused.

"Please, oh, please don't prevaricate to me about coyotes!" he pleaded with a kindly tone in his voice.

"How the Hades'd you know I was lying?" I demanded, hotly.

He give me an explanation out of his past associations with another perfessor. The thing was intensely in'trusting to me. It was long and complicated, but when he told me the twists and beauties of it, I could see the good sense. Jee whiz! When I found that there was a scienterific way, or rather numerous ways, of detecting the lies of another feller and also, contrairy wise, the truths, I demanded to be shown, and out of the gratitude and generosity of his heart, loving his fellow man, he explained to me. And briefly, to me, the idee was of the most intense satisfaction. You see, I play poker. All I eveh did want to know was when some sonovagun was running a bluff on me, and also when he was baiting me, in my virgin innerscence, forward to bucking three aces with a bluff of my own—him knowing me but not me him.

Briefly, and I trust not contagiously, the points to be observed is trivial displays of nervousness. A twitch of the eye, a wriggle of the finger, a pained look, a lick of the lips, a lifting of the ear muscles, a wriggle of one or both shoulders, a look of exceedingly great innocence, a glance away—each an' everyone of these, and such other things as a drag of the foot, or a redding of ear tips, or a swallowing, betrays one or another of a gent's antagonists in poker. Slight the sign may be but it's always there. Often a man tries to cover his betrayin' sign by taking a chaw or lighting a cigaret. And always this is a sign of embarrassment. A keen eye detects the shame in a man, the sign of regret that circumstances compels an honest citizen to lie, and then one's own problem is to cover up his particular self-betrayal. I could cover up. And them other fellers didn't know I was now scienterific and had the bulge on them. My land, if I didn't clean up!

Coyotes, big an' little, pales and darks, old and young, their own individual peculiarities, was what this here perfessor demanded to know. He paid me day wages, better'n a top hand would have got, just to show him the lie of the coyote nation from the north to the south and from sunrise to sunset, and through the starlight to the roseate dawn.

I inquired casually into his object. He refused to give himself away, which is fortunate for him, temporarily, at least. I suspected him of being one of these here authors, writing learned and gelorious accounts of nature for the edification and illumination of those who acquire book learning and presently spring the same on us who have but little of the same commodity. I had never associated with an industrious and painstaking notemaker before, but he was sure one lallapaloosah at the same.

He cross-examined me like the opposing attorney in a criminal killing case, in which I have been occasionally implicated, pro and con—seldom as an innocent bystander, however, the which is a quite proud fact in my record. Little by little this Perfessor Dules J. Burges, Ph.D.F., probed my experience as a trapper. He ascertained how I began as a boy to trap coyotes and loboes. He pursued my campaigns one by one, down the ringing course of years, winters when I trapped on high-sky lines, and then when I spot trapped in the Bad Lands for bounties and followed the lucrative green timber belt edges and specialized in the misfortunes of sheep flock raiders and calf and colt killers.

Step by step he took me into the various ways in which I set my No. 4's, my No. 5's, my kangaroos, my snares, my varied strategems in still hunting, runway watching, sandhill beguiling, curiosity and medicine baits; the wherefores of fish smells along streams, anise in the deer country, asafetida in the rutting days; coyotes that won't touch live bait but whose runways and particular information points may be discovered; traveler wolves which don't know the locale and old gummers which have worn down their teeth to the quick and they can't bite but must resort to worrying and mauling their soft-skinned tamed victims.

How did I know that coyotes preferred wild game, jackrabbits and deer? Why, hell! I'd tracked the scoundrels ten thousand miles and had seen them jump over tame animal tracks account of them not liking the smell. I had follered coyotes three days and knowed they hadn't had a mouthful, and seen them in the pride of their youth and intelligence refuse a fat calf but run their legs off chasing a deer as good as they were, till it got scairt and confused when the famished coyotes ate the same.

When it come six months later, him and me sat down in that there Pink Springs stage station and he showed me the information he had written down in notebooks about coyotes, particularly and for comparison and illumination, facts about gray wolves, coyotes and the black fellers, half bred crosses between gray and coyote wolves, and the both crossed with dogs . . . Huh! He had written on his portable typewriter—le's see, we'll figure the same for the sake of accuracy and fair warning to all them who is beguiled into giving up the insides of their heads, not knowing to what use the information and experiences is to be put.

We started in the middle of April, the 15th, kerzactly. We was sitting, on the 16th day of October, in the old station, at the fireplace where a large and twisted cedar root was blazing comfortable. I remember the same as if it was yesterday. This is 186 days. He had written in that period, and numbered the same—1,863 pages on his typewriter. We counted the number of words on specimen pages, and there were 28 lines and about 11 words to the line, average, he saying my conversation was generally short words but important. That is, 308 words to the page. Some typewriters makes 360 to the page, and some writers makes more and some less, which explains any diversity from limited human experience. My gosh! Which was the figures, 573,804 words. He accused me of having told him all them things, practically, and explained the features as him and me observed the same, he said, first hand feral natura.

In 186 days I had talked, the Lord knows how much, about things in which I wasn't int'rusted, but in them things I was eager to learn he had grabbed all them words, the equivalent, he said, of about six natural histories—and upwards of one hundred scienterific articles of about 5,780 words each. And the cur'us part of it was, to my eager mind, when he come to figure out the facts which I had told him, my conciseness of expression was such that I told him something about every ten words I said. I spoke two facts to every active verb. And so right there, to my astonishment, I learned I had actually 57,380 facts about coyotes in my head, of which very few was duplicates. My head's felt doggone heavy ever since. If I know that much about coyotes . . . And he proved to me that to set a trap for one old wise gummer I had to know upwards of 25,000 facts. . . .

How much do I know? Including horses, cows, mountain beaver, the ladies, music, me being a French harp enthusiast, geology—having prospected some—law, me having had numerous experiences with the same, religion, of which I know quite a lot of dif'rent kinds, Indian, and so on—well, for one spell I was real immodest and stuck up. And then this here perfessor he let on what he had learned in college, about biology and the sciences of coyotes, having bisected some for experimental purpose, him knowing the names of all the parts of a coyote, from lights to plume and his smelling apparatus. He named over to me some three dozen things about a coyote eye, lens and iris and such. He'd pumped me dry as to the ideas and habits of prairie wolf coyotes, but he had already the science of them.

"Now," he said, "we have just begun our investigations!"

"My gosh!" I gasped. "Ain't we through?"

"Nope," he assured me. And he was right. In them long cold nights, when the blizzards blew and the winds howled, the snow piled up in drifts and the fireplace sure felt plumb comfy, he would set there by the light of a gasolene lamp and we sorted out all them coyote lores and aspects. We individualized them. We analyzed their characters and pursued their personalities.

I had told him about fifteen or twenty prairie wolves which had buffaloed me. An' then I had told him about coyotes which had developed streaks of almost human intelligence and devilishness. And one by one he card indexed and painfully united all the facts according to the particular coyotes to which they had belonged. And then he united the coyotes in bands. Then he sorted out these here groups of coyotes according to the lands where they dwelt. And the coyotes which was in the low valleys had peculiar habits, but when they migrated in the spring to the high Alpine meadows they lived quite different. It was old gummers and it was lazy or hungry young coyotes which assaulted the lambs of sheep and the babies of cows. I showed him that.

"No!" he said sternly. "The coyote is a wuthless and despicable scoundrel. He has set for our domestic dogs a bad example. And the rascal coyotes should all be used for scienterific purposes."

I thought this here scienterific feller was going crazy, and I don't know but what he was. Anyhow, he was such a jackass about coyotes that I was at last disgusted, drawed my time and took my departure along in the spring. He had about 400,000 words more of new stuff which he had bloodsucked out of me by reminding me of here and there a coyote I had knowed and remembered details of. Well, anyhow, I pulled my freight just when he had used my information to locate a large number of coyote dens and was about to harvest some coyote pups for purposes of his own.

NOW, probably you won't believe me when I tell you what that feller done. 'Course, he wouldn't have done it if I had staid around there. He must of suspected the same because he never breathed a word to me about his intentions. Course, I might of knowed what to expect, him being a Ph.D.F. of the Univ. d. Philante and a biologist of the most high and scienterific note. He had all my information, and if he'd only had common sense what a joy he'd be'n to the world! I heard afterwards he had studied coyotes in North Dakotah, in Arkansaw swamps, in the Salt Grass of Texas, in Arizona, New Mexico and Coachella Valley. And because he was in'trested in p'isens he was run out of one county in Oregon, but otherwise he had full sweep and the freedom of the country. My gosh! Never was there such a biological surveyor and fact collector as this here feller who pumped me for coyote news, history, experience, habits, and the full line of details, specializing, as he declared, exclusive in coyotes.

Bright, cunning and awful intelligent, this here perfessor of prairie wolves knew 'em all, but what he didn't know is already indicated by me. I tried to tell him about jackrabbits, gophers, prairie dogs, mice, rats, and all them other wild animals. Nope! He had no int'rust whatever in them things. He was the coyote specialist of the range and so he remained. The habits of what coyotes ate was excluded as immaterial, irreverent an' inconsequential.

Just before I pulled my freight out of his headquarters he received a lot of long narrow test tubes of glass, suggesting himself in length and slimness. They was pasted over the top and they was full of yeller streaked with darkish and variegated substances.

"My, but they are precious!" he said to me, but I was too provoked with him an' his prejudice as regards coyotes, and me loving 'em for their amusing ways and the valuable exercise they give, keeping a man in good health trying to trap and outwit them. So I left him an' he was near forgot, two years in my past.

Well, me 'n' Perry Lorin and a feller name of George, the rest of whose name I didn't know, and a coupla gamblers from Ely was playing poker at the Washout Mines, where George was watchman and they is shut down. George was a good feller, open faced and talkative, but the two gamblers was living out on account of a sheriff's curiosity, over in Nevada somewhere, and quite a lot of tourists and one capitalist had stirred the sheriff's acumen with their tales of woe. So we was playing and them two gamblers was presently regarding me with the utmost confusion and suspicion. Anyhow, I owed this here perfessor a debt of gratitude which I was adding to right there. We had started playing with chips, but now we was using a lot of cash on account of my scienterific occasional interludes. I had about $600 stacked up before me, and was sitting pretty as a picture with complacency and the habit of intelligent observation, when George who had about $200 gone his way had a thirst, so he went to the water pail which was empty, starting for the spring about fifty yards away, a pouring of good mountain water out of a pipe into a concrete bowl.

The next minute after he was outside

e heard a cross between an Indian warhoop and a coyote yell, which has some semblances, but this here coyote was atural, while the Indian part was the oice of George. We heard the big galanized iron pail rattling and banging and lot of scuffling, account of loose planks round out there. So we looked out. The ight through the doorway revealed a big og coyote attacking George, and this here nine watcher was on the defensive.

So, according, I grabbed one of them ambler's six-guns, happily a revolver intead of one of them automatics which I in't acquainted with, and we dashed out o the rescue. George needed it, too. I oked two-three bullets into the coyote and e died most unusual, snarling and shaking is head, his eyes bulging and unforgiving nd his lips drawed back too far around is gums. My land, those teeth looked as pleasant as a rattlesnake's fangs! I felt y, just looking at them.

"My God, George! He bit you?" one f the gamblers exclaimed, and sure 'nough, George had been bit in the hand, in one g—I hate to think of it.

"Rabies!"

We forgot the game of poker. It takes lot to make a man $600 to the good and ck coming his way forget it, too. I took n ax and cut the head off that coyote. Them gamblers had come overland in a ig touring car, and we filled the tank. We let George bleed, encouraging it, in act. Me 'n' one of the gamblers and George, with the coyote head in a burlap nd wrapped in waterproof canvas, got into he car and headed for the Pasteur Labraories. They were 160 miles away. The oad was old, had been used to haul conentrates one way and supplies the other, or the first fifty-eight miles. Then it as fair to good, and finally concrete into alt City.

George was just an ornery looking fellow. Probably around forty years. He was round 5 foot 8 inches tall, and passing 150 in weight. He'd never particularly istinguished himself. He knew a lot, hough. He knew what being bit by a abies coyote meant.

"I wouldn't mind a bullet so much," e said, "and a knife makes me nervous, hinking about it. Course, being a hard ock man I've handled explosives. I've d the boys in when we didn't know if the roof'd cave some more. Back East in the soft coal country where I used to drive steel, three-four of us went in without masks because we didn't have eny. Gas was bad. . . That's what ailed my lungs and why I had come out here. . . It was cold weather, and when I come out the cold hit my lights and crumpled them up, they being weak account of gas."

"But you brought them out—those you went after?"

"Oh, yes. All but those under the rock," he said. "As I was saying, those things aren't—well, like this."

You see, he was feeling it. Rabies! Supposing—oh, hell! Well, anyhow, he had to say that much, once. That's all. He took a smoke and sat there, swinging back and forth as we rocked, rolling. There were times as we went that it looked like we three might roll clear over. George would have prefered that, I know. And, course this isn't bragging—but I'd taken my chance just to have him out of what he feared was ahead of him, but couldn't help. When I want a highwater mark by which to measure a brave man, I tell you, I think of George sitting there in the starlight, riding in to see 'f there was anything they could do for him. Thank God there was! We got him there in time. This here gambler, he wore out some tires, and one of those Mormons come out with his car and we completed the trip in it. George was all right.

The coyote was a big dog, like I said. He had rabies mighty bad. And yet away yonder an old boy, name of Pasteur, had figured out a treatment, and if a man gets to it, why they save him. We didn't know much about it, that trip. But presently we were learning.

YEH. We wondered where that mad coyote come from. We rode out, looking around, trying to get a line on which way he'd romped in. We couldn't tell, but we all carried shotguns. I rode with mine ready for business. We carried rifles, too. And then we begun to have use for them.

There was a cayuse with a Box X brand over in the *bajada* slope out on the Convict Range—it's black and white in rock layers part way up—and this here cayuse began to mill around. Then he started lifting his hoofs high and throwing his head and tail. He chased and bit two other horses and I come riding alone down on him, hell-bent, course. I shot them two which was bit as I passed by, and headed in on that sick scoundrel till he seen me and swung short coming back meeting me a liberal halfway, if he could.

Eveh face a rabies-mad horse?. . . No? That's all right—don't. When you get the chance to, pass it up. Take my advice and go four hundred miles around. Doggone! Course, I'm middling fair in experience and have had my bad habits, been young and keerless in my day—I have a fair choice among my mem'ries when I'm wishing I had something to abuse or congratulate myself about. That horse ain't one of the things I like to remember, especially when I'm sleeping in some large boarding house, where I went to sleep with too much on my stomach. Whoopee! When I have the nightmare I always am tied fast and see that horse a-coming. I had a .30-30 carbine. Being right there in reality was worse than a nightmare, I tell you that. I put them shots, all of them, plumb straight into that chest. The next thing I was working my .45 six-gun—fast! He stopped, with his open mouth and dripping teeth close enough. . . And we burned them their carcasses.

Then a feller and his girl was over by Juniper City sitting in each other's neighborhood when a wide-chested coyote come loping by, circled and reached for an open side door window. This feller was a friend of mine by the name of Raton Pindle. It was a nice moonlit night and the season was summer. Well, he seen the coyote coming and knowed the way it stretched its head and sprawled in the air he had a handful on its way. Pindle had a blanket robe and he swung this with a sweep of his arm, and just naturally wrapped that blamed coyote all up into it, being the beast was chewing it happily and he was a champion hogtier from Nevada. When he got the package made he broke the back he could feel inside, an' tied the bundle on his rear bumpers. That un had rabies, too, come to have the head examined.

Along about the time a thousand sheep, some hundreds of cows, an' quite a lot of horses was showing the symptoms, and skunks was coming down the middle of the roads with their tails standing straight up, a lot of us people around them parts begu to step high ourselves. Doggone! Tak them damned ground squirrels, now. Afte I'd seen a couple traveling my way wit distorted vision and a most unusual a of anxiety to close in, I got so I circl wide around a prairie dog town, yes, si S'posing them prairie dogs took to bein savage and reckless in their dispositio Pet dogs had to be tied up. Cats gre suspicious and leery in their manners.

Then there was a drove of hogs, whic was on thin pasture and was lean, ha symptoms. Take a fat hog an' he don get rabies; prob'ly for the same reas a rattlesnake finds 'em discouraging t assault. Why, when I heard a man sp one day I give a jump six foot, turnin like a rabbit in the air, landing all read for business. He thought I was gone th way, too, an' all that saved the poorest an slowest shot between us was we was bot crawfishing to put distance between us u like them with rabies afflictions. I wo my chaps when I walked so's I'd hav pertection to my belt, anyhow.

Daytimes we rode with an anxiety a alertness that hadn't been known sin Utes were riding light. And nights w didn't ride at all, but staid to home as m in many a day. Weddings fell off migh promiscous, I tell you that, and this w in a marrying country. School teache carried shotguns, and when the youngste was on their way to and from school, th had outriders full of determiniation a alertness, ready for business.

ALL the time I had an uneasy feelin I had something in my head coudn't reach with my tongue to s it. Theh 'twas! 'Sociatin' with that P D.F. feller I had learned that it was po sible to drag out of the mind things yo didn't even know was there. So I beg to see if I knew things which wa'n't s and didn't know things which was so. had seen that perfessor drag nigh hard t 75,000 facts I didn't know I knew rig plumb outen my mind, and more and mo I recklected about that feller. When saw a coyote coming I'd think of him- and I'd shoot that coyote handsome. tell anybody a man's marksmanship su improves when the consequences of missi is a ride to the Pasteur Labratories with t hope that you'll survive. Course, if i just a man hunting you, you get careless, but never when it's a mad coyote.

Some nights I'd dream about that Perfessor Burges Ph.D.F. I'd try to go to sleep and couldn't. If I went to sleep I'd dream about a horse with dripping fangs on the way to me. And I'd see coyotes grinning around me. One night when I'd seen a cougar actin' suspicious back on our mountang I got so I squawled like a cat, an' it took three men to wake me up. They roped me from a distance first, too, and stretched me out all over the place, account of, if I was awake, I more'n likely had the hydrophobia.

I drove out one week to the Pink Springs station on my way across that part o' the country. All around, it looked pretty bare. There wa'n't no coyote tracks. There wa'n't but here and there horse tracks. And let me tell you a mad horse makes pitiful trails across the desert while the lakes of the mirage make it stand on his hind legs pawing at the sun, it looks like.

Theh was the old stone cabin, an' inside was all the homemade and second hand furniture. Theh was a familiar cooking kit and oveh a wire was the blankets, and when I looked into the shelves of the soapboxes cabinet with doors I come upon a box, which I recognized as the one that had come in with them there slim long test tubes of glass in it. And when I come to paw around in that mess I found some labels and on these I read:

DANGEROUS

RABIES GERMS

HANDLE CAREFULLY!

I backed right up, like I was into a rattlesnake den. I went looking around right, then. I found a thin little file of letters in a big red envelope with a flap tied down over it. I opened them and begun to read:

BUREAU OF EXPERIMENTAL BIOLOGISTS,

DEPARTMENT OF EPIDEMICS.

Professor Dules J. Burges, Ph.D.F.,
Pink Springs,
P. O. Salty Land.
My Dear Professor:

We are delighted that at last you are ready to pursue your experimental inoculation of coyotes for the extinction of those vermin whose damage to domestic herds and flocks has been so interesting and caused such enormous losses.

We are sending per express, in haste, handle with care, dangerous and special rates for immediate delivery, twelve (12) tubes of our rabies gellatins which you will find exceedingly satisfactory, as they were obtained through cultures extracted from Black Forest sheep dogs, which as you know are Wendell Law descendents from black wolves, and indistinguishable biologically from any kind of wolves, except African jackals.

We await with great interest the account of your experiments and are sure that coyotes will become a thing and a menace of the past.

Yours truly,
EXPERIMENTAL BIOLOGISTS,
Per *J. Ackley Bufort, Ph.D.F.*

I know you won't believe it. I've got the reputation of being a reg'lar liar, hopeless in habit and miserable in consequences account of me being unable to contain myself as regards this thing. There ain't anybody going to believe what I've told. I know you won't, stranger. But every once in a while I just got to bust right out and talk what's on my mind. There I'd 'sociated with that there wah-wah-wah scienteristic feller an' never knowed enough to kill him when I had so many chances. This here rabies infliction run through from along about 1918 till it sorta begun to fade out along in 1926 and 1927. You ask anybody from up there this side the Red Desert to along over there in the west where you'll see the Leopard Spots on the mountains. It's about two hundred miles thataway, and close hand to three hundred the other way. The mountain ranges seem to have checked the spreading of rabies beyond that big an' mighty lively circle, while it lasted.

The perfessor . . . What become of him? You mean this here Dules J. Burges, Ph.D.F.? What happened to him, you want to know? . . . Uh! That's funny, too. You know he was what they call a biological specialist. He limited himse'f to coyotes, an' their aspects as regards loboes or gray wolves. He never learned nothing about coyotes but what concerned coyotes. He knowed that some coyotes was eating sheep, calves, colts. He listed them things as coyote food. He didn't know that for every pound of mutton, beef and horse meat they ate, as a family, about a hundred pounds of mice, jackrabbits and such. The economics and ratios didn't mean nothing to him. He wanted to have the fun of exterminating them coyotes experimentally. Yes, sir. He done it.

What? . . . Where'd he go, this perfessor? Why—uh— Oh, I see! Yeh. He come back about three years later to make a subsequent follow-up investigation. My gosh! I couldn't believe my eyes when I seen him, same old Slim Jim an' same old bag an' a hopeful expression on his face. He seen me. I prayed he'd forget our last talk. He did. Two or three recognized him about the same time but I got him into my automobile first. Them other fellers—old sheep and cow men, you know—they looked awful disappointed. Same time he was mine. They knowed how I felt. I was kind of responsible, anyhow, telling him all I had about coyotes.

He clumb down from the train along in the middle of the mornin'. Ninety miles from theh an' about twelve thirty o'clock we et dinner. He was tol'able quiet as we rode out. His questions were few an' my answers was stimulating to the appetite for information. On me was the performance of a duty, account of me bein' the lucky man to get the chance. I'd always envied those fellers called upon to perform a public service, not for money, not for reputation, not even in the sight of the multitudes regardin' a hero with their applause and envy.

I don't mind admitting I was seeking personal satisfaction an' the chance to make a right int'restin' death bed confession, did I pass out that way, or an ante-execution statement, acting sorry but hoping the circumstances of my feats made them pardonable. We were going out to look oveh the effects of this here scienterific experiment. At the top of the last divide into the Wild Horse Basin I looked back. I was going to have witnesses, all sure enough. Some of those fellers back at the new railroad was poking along about thirty miles behind, judging by the dust. They supposed this here road we was going in on ended over yonder in the basin at the Corral Trap Waterhole. The last thing I had in mind was disappointing them.

Along about this time I let loose all the information I had been accumulating and was boiling oveh with about this here rabies experiment, innoculating coyotes to exterminate them. This here Perfessor Dules J. Burges, Ph.D.F., Univ. d. Philante, always was a good listener, like I've said. He'd ask a question an' it'd take half an hour to answer him, far and wide.

I told him about the coyotes runnin' mad an' attacking everything from squirrels to humans, from domestic milch cows to wild horses. I kept the emphasis and satisfaction out of my voice that I had the chance to tell him, all according to my innumerable accumulation of facts of which this feller had taught me the couting of.

He'd taught me to observe scienterific, as he said. I remembered presently that in the old days he'd always said "Yes?" kind of inquiring when I remarked something particularly truthful and outrageous. And now he said to them skunk walking up the middle of the road, "No!" And to them horses coming with dripping jaws, "No!" He kept saying "No!" emphatic, like there was some truths beyond belief which didn't mollify my feelings none, considering how many tens of thousand facts he sapped out of me, sticking in a question and then sitting by to let 'em bubble and gurgle out. Huh! Lying, was I? I didn't have to lie to be interestin', not any more.

SO WE come into those wide open places where the wild horses were in bands. Ahead of us was a washed down range of crumbling rock mountains, home of the scorpin and rattlesnake. Then, too, coyotes had their dens in numbers. Catchers of wild horses had moved out of this basin lately. Rabies had come in, that's why. Here was freshness of hydrophobia and exhuberance of the high peak stages.

As we come theh I seen a big antelope jack skyhooting off across an alkali playa, heading past us about a hundred yards ahead. A jackrabbit always looks plumb ridiculous to me, but this one was the exception. He was a buck and mad. Yes, sir. I've never seen nothing with the rabies that looked funny. All them patients give me the creeps.

"Hold on," the perfessor said. "Let me look!"

He had a dinky little pair of glasses with which he focused on that jack till only a puff of dust could been seen. He took off his hat to wipe his dry and dusty brow. He didn't say anything. This was a good chance for me to put into execution my project of leaving him out there where the wild coyotes were raving and even the horses and rabbits was suffering from his innoculating them with his fool experimental destruction. I didn't take my chance to leave him, though.

I could see, now, slithering through the low brush, and among the rocks on the hills ahead, the running victims of madness. I had kind of in mind to take him over closer to those infested slopes, *bajadas* of living horror. I wanted revenge, lots of it, for what we'd all suffered in property loss and bitterness, for our friends, and worse yet the being afraid. I tell you, there ain't nobody eveh going to be forgiven who from malice and wilfulness makes men and women, more especially little children, afraid. I was so far gone myself in terror I'd actually decided to leave a fellow human being where the rabid coyotes or jackrabbits or horses would get him.

Why didn't I? . . . Oh, yes. I didn't leave him there.

He'd watched that jackrabbit walloping off across the alkali into the mirage. He saw a slithering motion out of the corner of his eye and he looked at the mountain full of epidemic. He rolled his eyes around, looking at the horizon. He saw the three lifts of dust from the several automobiles which had pursued us, making sure I done my duty as all of denizens of the desert had seen it.

Perfessor Dules J. Burges bit his lip. His fingers twitched among the triangular ties of his handkerchief. He rolled his eyes up to look at me, square in the face, hesitating.

"I noticed they give me quite a hard line of expressions over at the railroad," he said in a thoughtful way he had. "Course, they knew I innoculated the coyotes?"

"Yes, they all have known it."

"And those men coming back there? They're watching what you do to me?"

"Why—uh—to see that I do it, perfessor."

"I see," he nodded. "I don't blame them. I don't blame you, old man. I didn't know anything but coyotes. I meant well but I made a mistake. It's a pity I didn't die before I made it. I'm sorry. Always men must sometimes die for their own folly! I wondered about you. You were pretty quiet, hard—and your smile was terrible. If you don't mind I'd like to borrow your revolver. I know what I deserve, but if you would be so kind I'd rather take a bullet than. . . ."

He nodded toward that infested ridge.

I suppose I'm a dadblasted sentimentalist. I'd never seen a man willing wholly to take his medicine for doing crimes, let alone making a mistake. Educated, proud, knowing an awful lot about one thing—doing his best, too—he was facing the music. He didn't whine. He just wanted me to know he hadn't done it a-purpose. He was honorable. Behind all that he knew was something bigger than all the rest of him. He was trying now to see the right to do it. He'd learned a lesson, I reckoned. He knowed so much I reckoned prob'ly he'd be some use from now on, though I bet it'd take an awful lot of intelligent performances to make up for what his damned foolery had done to us folks.

"Hop in!" I said to him. "I just wanted yo' to see what a mess you made of things, that's all!"

"You're lying!" he shook his head. "If you don't—why those fellows back there will. No use you're losing your reputation and their friendship. My account isn't worth that, old man!"

"We all make mistakes," I told him. "When a man who knows as much as you makes one, it's mighty important, that's the dif'rence."

Doggone! Tears come to his eyes. He give me the most complimentary look that ever was directed at me. I pulled my gun on him and told him I'd blow the daylights into him if he didn't get aboard. So he did, and we headed for the South Pass out of Wild Horse Basin. They used to tote mine supplies through there in the old days and we made it about a long rifle shot ahead of those fellers follering us, who thought something and had pursued.

I got Burges to the railroad, away down the line. He prodded me all the way for idees, more'n facts. I felt foolish and highfaluting, course.

"Good-by, old man" he said to me, parting. "I needed your wisdom with your facts. I'm grateful beyond expression for both!"

Back home the boys mostly felt the way I did, so there wa'n't any hard feelings about what I'd done.

*Here is a Yarn of Hale Good Humor*

# *The* WAGES *of* SINCLAIR

## By THOMAS THURSDAY

ALTHOUGH one of my favorite writers is Roscoe P. Anonymous, I never could get his autograph, no fooling. As you are undoubtlessly aware, this smart biscuit—wisecracker—has tossed off a whole slew of terse and tasty *bons mots*. For the example, get a load of this:

*Bunk costs less than nothing and it's getting cheaper every day.*

Which nifty leads us to today's lesson—meaning the case of De Lancey Sinclair, Melrah, the Wild Bull of Indo-Hawawa, and several others too humorous to mention. Honest, my countrymen, your own handmade radio never squarked out a bedtime story that could surpass this sequel to the best Arabian Nightmares. Am I going to tell the world about it? Try and stop me!

In the event you don't care to become too familiar with strangers, I better break down and confess my identity. For no good reason that I can personally figure out, I'm Doc McKeezick, and at the time the following apple strudle took place, I was managing the sideshow with Ike Sullivan's *Wild West Rodeo and Freak Hippodrome*. Speaking of even temperaments, there was a job that would of ruffled Charley Lindbergh!

Well, to get down to business, as the cat remarked to the cornfed mouse, we was playing a slab called La Fritz, Oklahoma, when the Old Man laid down the law of the profits to Bill Dolan, our public relations guy.

"Listen," yelps Mons. Sullivan to Bill, "why ain't you playing up Melrah? They's a angle to that lad that should knock the yokels for a complete set of Miami ear muffs."

"Melrah?" retorts Bill, arching his eyebrows as becomes a gentleman. "Oh, yes, Melrah! Well, to tell the truth, Mister Sullivan——"

"Who's asking you to tell the truth?" sizzles the Old Man. "I am asking you why you ain't getting no publicity for Melrah. And now listen: Either you get some newspaper space for Melrah or get a new place to loaf in!"

Bill blinks and leans against the bally stand.

"Doc," he says to me, "who in the Gehenna *is* Melrah?"

"Where you been lately?" demands Side-Trap Simpkins, my inside lecturer and one of the best *raconteurs* in the show business. "Melrah joined the kid top several days ago and he's a prime boob buster."

"He's all of that," I helps out.

"He can lick Tunney with one hand while sending Dempsey to the embalmers with the other," goes on Side-Trap. "Wait —here he comes with his manager."

"Mr. Sinclair," I says, "I want you to mitt our public relations man, Mr. Bill Dolan."

"H'mm," sniffs Sinclair. "May I ask where you get your publicity published—that is, in which European papers? I have never seen——"

"Huh," says Bill, the bit nonplused. "I suppose that you are one of them lads who think you got a better attraction than a five pound elephant, and kick like sixty-two mules because you don't rate reams of front page blaah in all the languages, including the Scandinavian. . . Well, what's your grift?"

"Grift?" echoes Sinclair, puzzled. "I'm afraid I don't grasp your meaning."

"How long you been in the show business?" demands Bill.

"I am not a showman. I am an explorer, hunter, and a writer of travel books. I call your particular attention to my forthcoming work, which I have decided to call 'Dawn In Darkest Africa.' "

"Sounds like a snappy bedtime story," remarks Side-Trap. "Er—does the hero marry the gal and the villain get socked on the chin?"

"What about this Melrah stuff?" goes on Bill.

"Melrah should be the heavyweight champion of the world," confesses Sinclair.

"Me, too," adds Side-Trap. "Only Tunney refuses to box me while I spar him with a machine gun."

"In the uncharted forests of Indo-Hawawa," continues Sinclair, "I discovered the man I have named 'Melrah'. When I first observed him he was swinging from tree to tree."

"Oh, I begin to understand!" says Bill. "You got a monkey, hey?"

Sinclair strokes his goatee and looks the bit piqued.

"Does this wonderful specimen of muscular manhood look like a simian?" demands Sinclair, pointing at the giant Melrah. "It is true that he cannot speak one word of English, but language has nothing to do with prize fighting."

"No?" chimes in Side-Trap. "I guess you ain't never sat in the cheap seats!"

Sinclair turns to Melrah, and says a few words in plain English, to wit:

"Mobay sicoo umcoo!"

Melrah strikes a attitude, growls like a whole family of wolves, and settles down to some snappy shadow boxing. His left hand grazes the buxom beezer of Bill, and he steps back briskly.

"Turn it off," says Bill. "I think he is very, very good. Er—just what angle do you want worked up from the publicity standpoint?"

"Simply tell the truth," replies Sinclair.

"You mean you don't want any publicity?" demands Bill, pop-eyed.

"I mean I want you to tell the exact truth concerning Melrah," replies Sinclair. "I am convinced that he is the greatest heavyweight boxer of all time, and my sole reason for joining a common sideshow is to advertise him about the country and attract attention. The boxing promoters will then be compelled to listen to the public clamor and give Melrah a match. After he has defeated all the logical contenders, he will go after the crown of Gene Tunney."

"A tasty dish of frankfurters," says Bill Dolan. "Er—what does he do in the kid show, bend lamp-posts around his neck and bite holes in anvils?"

"Nothing so crude," gloops Sinclair. "Melrah will guarantee to whip any man who boxes him, in four rounds or less. If any opponent should last the full period the management will forfeit five hundred dollars."

"Real jack?" asks Bill. "Besides, what is the gimmick?"

"I have just explained that Melrah is a native of Indo-Hawawa," sputters Sinclair.

"I wasn't speaking about the big chump," says Bill. "You know what I mean, the racket, the gaff of the joint, the——"

"What is this man talking about?" demands Sinclair, throwing up his hands.

"Cut it!" snaps Old Man Sullivan. "Trouble with you scissor-bills is that you are so used to bunk, bull and boloney you can't tell a genuine gent when you see one. Mr. Sinclair is just what he claims to be. He will tell you the truth about Melrah and see that you get it circulated right."

The Old Man wiggles his smoke, lets out a parting snort, and blows over to the big top.

"Speaking of Hans Christian Andersen," says Bill to Sinclair, "let's hear *your* fairy tale."

"There is no fairy tale about it," retorts Melrah's manager. "Melrah weighs two hundred and ten pounds and can whip any man on earth. I discovered him in his native jungle, as I have previously stated, and brought him to America last year. I tried to get him matches with various promoters but all refused to give him a chance. As a last resort, I wrote Mister Sullivan, explained the situation fully, and asked him if we might join his show. The idea, of course, is to gain publicity and thus force the boxing barons to permit Melrah to demonstrate his natural ability."

"So you think he's good, eh?" asks Bill.

"I know it," confesses Sinclair. "If he wasn't, would Mister Sullivan be willing to forfeit five hundred dollars to any chance opponent who remains four rounds with him?"

"What if some hick should knock your lad on one of his two ears?" demands Bill.

"No chance," replies Sinclair. "Not a ghost of a chance. I tell you that Melrah is so powerful that he could take John L. Sullivan and toy with him like a baby."

Bill turns to Melrah and says:

"Listen, ape, you better be good, or the Old Man will knock you kicking personally."

"Umgum paloy!" snarls Melrah, showing his' ivory tusks.

"Careful!" cautions Sinclair. "I told you he doesn't understand a word of English."

"Then what's he getting steamed up about?" demands Bill.

"I suppose he doesn't like your face."

"Well, even if *his* was pretty I wouldn't like it," says Bill and walks away briskly.

BY THE time we reached our next stand; i.e., Stew Hollow, Melrah was all primed to do his stuff. Although his particular brand of hoy was a little out of focus in a kid top—he should have been in an athletic show, under separate canvas—we constructed a regulation ring, with the usual implements of gore, such as sponge, bucket, ammonia, collodion, and the like.

Well, speaking of Barnum, Bill Dolan tore off a piece of publicity hokum that packed the canvas the opening night. According to the succulent *hanswurst* that Bill had blackjacked the editor of the Sage County *Moron Mauler* into smearing over his front page, Melrah could whip Dempsey, Tunney, Sharkey, Heeney and, if need be, the Marines. In fact, Melrah was such a powerful specimen of genus homo—whatever that is— that noted physicians, after examining his physique, proclaimed him marvelous. Muscles of steel, sinews of iron, and the strength of a flock of Mexican bulls. In his native habitat, Indo-Hawawa, he was the king of kings, and even the lions, tigers and elephants gave him the right of way when he honked his horn.

As to Mr. De Lancey Sinclair, F.R.A.G. B.V.D., etc., ditto the world's most famous explorer—he had one hell of a time grabbing off Melrah. Although Sinclair had given Bill an inkling of how he had captured Melrah, Bill had his own idea of just how a bird like Melrah should of been captured. Bill's version went like this:

Upon seeing Melrah leaping from tree to tree, Sinclair at first mistook him for a giant orang-utang—and who could blame 'im? Anyway, Sinclair turned to his aide and companion, Hair-Pants Hawkins, a well seasoned cowboy from the wilds of New Jersey, and told Hair-Pants to circle his lariat around Melrah's footwide neck. This was speedily accomplished, and while Melrah snorted like a flivver in a North Dakota January, he was subdued via a sock over the nut with a blackjack.

After Melrah had completed his course in astronomy, he was dumbfounded to note that he was bound, gagged, and on board a boat for Merrie England. During the twenty-day voyage (a speedy scow, hey?) Melrah raised hell and high water, and at one time grabbed the captain by the whiskers. Fin'ly, the explorer had to subdue him by hypnotism, and while under the hypnotic spell Melrah became nice and amiable and began to talk like a gentleman, although his accent was a bit gutteral and harsh. As to just how the big sap learned the gentle art of modified murder; i.e., pugeylism, Bill put his well brewed brain into high speed and informed the land that the credit should be given to one Horizontal Hennessey a sailor on board.

Horizontal had once been the pride of the King's Navy, but too much of the King's Scotch had floored him for the count. Howsoever, the sailor taught Melrah all the tricks of the cauliflower trade, and that was that. Bill concluded his sequel to "Alice in Wonderland" by telling how Sinclair had brought Melrah to My Country 'Tis of Thee and, after getting by the immigration lads, had made fruitless attempts to get a match with the promoters. So he hit upon the very bright idea of traveling with a circus sideshow, meet all comers, and in this manner attract attention to his cave man.

"How about it?" asks Bill, after Mons. Sinclair has got a slant at the write-up.

"Silly," says Sinclair. "You have stretched the truth tremendously."

"So?" twitters Bill. "Well, what d'yer think of that mob jamming into the show, huh?"

"What does that signify?" asks Sinclair.

"Showmanship!" snaps Bill. "What d'yer suppose it signifies, a mocking bird calling to its mate? Why, they have swallowed my bait hook, line and mackerel!"

"I could have written a better one," admits Sinclair, a testy lad.

"So could Shakespeare," snaps Bill, and ambles down the midway.

Just before Side-Trap Simpkins came around to introduce Melrah, he walks up to me, looking the trifle buffaloed.

"Say, Doc," he says, "what kind of spiel goes with this Melrah racket?"

"Oh, just tell the truth," I suggests.

"Where is it?" he wants to know, and so do I.

"In the paper," I replies, and that was all settled.

WHILE assorted punchers, dude wranglers, deputy sheriffs, tough and tenderfeet milled around the platform, Side-Trap begins a lecture on Melrah that would have made the Grimm Brothers think they was working for the Associated Press. Melrah punctuated Side-Trap's talk with sundry grunts, growls, snarls, or what have you. He sat in the left corner of the ring, hands over the ropes, and looked madder than a Florida realtor after the sis-boom-blaah collapsed. One of the cash customers, some big hombre fresh off the range, jabs a pin in Melrah's rear housing to see if he was human. With a roar Melrah jumps up and taps the inquisitive lad one on the kisser. Sinclair rushes over to his pet, whispers a few hokus-jokus words in his shell-like ear, and Melrah settles back to normalcy. The other patrons thought this was a part of the show, and although the big hombre limped out of the tent, they gave him a good hand as he left.

"In conclusion, lay-dees and gentlemun," winds up Side-Trap, "I want it understood that the management will not be responsible for any damage done to anybod-ee who volunteers to remain four rounds with Melrah. He who succeeds in staying the limit wins five hundred dollars in either gold, silver, or if you bring your own bags, you can have it in pennies. But get me straight, now! I ain't trying to scare anybod-ee, remembah; but if the ambulance service in this berg ain't good and speedy some guy might be sent to the cleaners. Further——"

At this point De Lancey Sinclair, who had been fidgeting in the rear, jerked Side-Trap by the coat-tail and coughed.

"Please shut up," says Sinclair, politely. "You embarrass me. Besides, your language is rather weird, to say the least." Then, after pushing the dumbfounded Simpkins to the rear, he goes on, to the audience, "I beg of you, good friends, not to take the remarks of the previous speaker very seriously. He is, of course, just joshing. He is laboring under the impression that he is a humorist. However, East is East and West is West, but never the Mark Twain shall meet. Now, I want you to know that there is no danger in boxing with Melrah. You simply take the ordinary chances of the ring, and that is all. Melrah will be fair and square. Won't you, Melrah?"

"Gimjah gim!" replies the big dark baby.

"He says he will box like a gentleman," beams Sinclair, translating. "Who will be the first to try?"

For a long moment, there is no danger of anybody being killed in the rush to box Melrah.

"What!" barks Sinclair. "Is there no one in this large and manly Western audience who knows the art of self-defense?

Bear in mind, please, that you have a chance of winning five hundred dollars."

As nobody steps forward, the diplomatic Side-Trap jumps to the front, and glares at one and all.

"Well, well, well!" he yelps. "D'yer mean to tell me that none of you wild and woolly Western hombres got guts enough to come up and tackle this Missing Link?"

Once again Sinclair pushes Side-Trap to the rear.

"I do not care to have you refer to Melrah as the Missing Link," he fumes. "He is nothing of the sort. I would esteem it a favor if you would scatter your doubtful humor elsewhere."

"Don't ritz me, fellow!" steams up Simpkins. "That guy could pass for a whole set of Missing Links, and you know it. Take a good look at his pan, will you? If that mug is human, then I'm a Patagonian pelican. No wonder the boys are afraid to come up and box 'im. Why——"

A rawboned cowboy pushes his way through the mob and nonchalantly climbs into the ring. He's about six feet six and weighs enough to bust the rear springs of a Detroit Demon.

"Muh name is Saddle-Back Clancy," he drawls. "I'm a man of few words, and here's the few: *I crave to knock that guy's liver into his lungs, and I'm all primed to start.*"

"Have you any friends to act as your seconds?" inquires Sinclair.

"And what sort of a slab do you want to be wedged under?" butts in Side-Trap.

"Don't need no seconds," says Saddle-Back. "This brawl will be all over at about the same time it begins."

"You should ought to have some seconds," advises Side-Trap. "Wait—maybe I can dig you up a pair from the gang." Then, addressing the mob, he asks, "Will a couple of you brave guys come up and toss a pail of water on Mr. Clancy when he tests the canvas?"

Two short lads, both bandylegged, crawl through the ropes and grin broadly.

"I'm Mike," says one, "and this is muh brother, Ike. We don't know this hombre but we aim to see that he gets a square deal."

"Don't worry about that," says Sinclair, "he'll get a square deal."

Well, to cut down a tall story, Sinclair selects a referee from the customers, gives the lads their instructions—speaking English to Clancy and Indo-Hawawaish to Melrah—then appoints me chime clanger and time keeper.

"And may the best man win!" ejaculates Sinclair.

I bang the gong and the amusement begins.

WITH a junglelike snarl Melrah rushes from his corner, with the noble objects of knocking Mons. Clancy over the ropes, through the air and out through the main entrance. He leads off with a vicious right hook, aimed at the cow lad's chin, but misses from here to Greenwich Village. The cowboy ducks and the blow glances off a ring post. This enrages the cultured Melrah and he begins to chatter fire and brimstone.

"Lumjah lum!" he yelps.

"Fight in English!" shoots back Clancy, ducking another heavy duty sock.

"Wot's the name of the new dance?" bellers some lad in the crowd. "Stand up and fight, you divin' Venuses. I shore hanker for plenty action!"

***Wham!***

Clancy feints with his left and, while Melrah was apparently admiring some gal in the crowd, his adversus shoots a stinging sock to the dark lad's button. Melrah's legs sag, his eyes roll, and I figured he was about to descend and inspect the canvas.

"Malom lom!" bellers Sinclair, and if you know what he said, drop a line to me.

Melrah falls into a clinch, shakes his head a few times, then breaks, and goes after Clancy with everything but the ring posts and center poles. He leaps on the gangling cow gent like a sea gull on a minnow and, before Clancy could get his hands pumping, Melrah peppered him dizzy. His nose began to do a red Niagara Falls, while his left eye closed like a porthole in a heavy sea.

"Foul!" howls Mike, one of Clancy's self-appointed seconds. "The big tramp hit him so low he almost hurt his hand on the floor!"

"Hop back in your clock, Cuckoo!" yelps Side-Trap. "That last sock was so high it near went over his head!"

"I know what I saw," shoots back the steaming Mike. "This fight is crooked!"

"So's your ears!" remarks Side-Trap.

A moment later a whole flock of riots bust loose.

Clancy rallies and begins to aim many wild and woolly punches at his opponent. Melrah starts to back around the ring, then begins to do a hundred yard dash in all directions. Naturally, this draws *beaucoup* boos from the cash clients, and what they said they never learned in Sunday school.

Finally, Melrah stops dead near Clancy's corner, plants both feet solid, then makes a roundhouse swing at his panting playmate. At the moment the blow started, Mike, enraged at some witticism from Side-Trap Simpkins, pushes through the ropes, with the main idea of having a game of fisticuffs with my noble lecturer. But—not so good! As Clancy ducks Melrah's roundhouse blow, Mike arrives in time to stop it plumb on the beak. Mike sails through the ropes and lands in the lap of a paying patron, cold as a polar bear's nose.

"How about that, referee?" demands Side-Trap. "That fighter should be disqualified. His second climbs into the ring while the bout is on."

"He ain't in the ring *now*, is he?" yodels the bright referee.

Meantime, Ike grabs the water bucket, with the object of attending to brother Mike. In his excitement, Ike tosses the sponge out of the bucket, and it lands in the center of the ring.

"Well, how about *'at*, referee?" shouts Side-Trap for the second time.

"Shut yore mouth!" retorts the referee. "The sponge ain't hurtin' anybody, is it?"

Life is like that!

This gets Side-Trap so red-headed that he almost ignites in flames.

"You are one helluva guy to referee!" snorts Mr. Simpkins. "What has Melrah got to do to win—mow that guy over with a machine gun? I gotta good mind to slap you down."

The jovial referee walks around the prancing Clancy, edges to Side-Trap's corner, and snarls:

"I aim to give you-all a chance!"

While Simpkins and the referee were informing each other just where they and their whole family should reside, Melrah shoots a mean right to Clancy's heart. Clancy topples backwards, upsets the referee, and both spend the next few moments in reclaiming the right legs and arms.

At this juncture it occurs to me that I should look at my watch to see if the first three-minute round was up. It was! As the matter of facts, that three-minute frame had skidded six seconds past five minutes, so I rang the bell. Howthesoever, Clancy and Melrah were the wee trifle too busy to pay any attention to chimes. I ring it a couple or three times more, and when that didn't stop 'em, I give a good imitation of a hick town fire engine bell going to a three alarm fire.

"Time!" I bellers.

Melrah pauses and takes a look at me. While his head was turned, Clancy belts him a right hook on the top of his head. This annoys Melrah quite the plenty. With a snort, he starts a roundhouse swing from down near the canvas and lets it go. It lands safely on Clancy's chin, and Clancy lands safely on the canvas. He was out as far as a pelican's nose!

"Is there someone else who would care to box Melrah?" cooes Sinclair.

Nope, lads and lassies, there was nobody else—which gives me a chance to hop into the last chapter. (If you know who the villain *is*, don't breathe a word to your neighbor. Let 'im turn to the back of the book himself.)

OUR next town was chamber-of-commercing under the tasty title Rio del Hooch. Melrah knocks a big puncher flat in the first round, bows solemnly to the customers, and strikes a picturesque attitude.

Our next stand was not so good. I'll just take a moment to tell you about it, then you can turn on the radio and tune in on the closing prices of the Abyssinian market.

Speaking of baked rovallo, as they remark around Tampa Bay, when we pulled into Whiskers Cañon we find that Bill Dolan has done a fine job with the local paper. No fooling, he had a front page blurb about the mighty Melrah that would of made no less than Barnum hock his harp, clip his wings, descend from glory, and start trouping again. According to the glib Bill, Melrah was the champion of Europe, Asia, Africa and a large part of Coney Island. He also stated that Melrah could whip any cowpuncher in Whiskers Cañon, including his hoss. Naturally, this blaah challenges the virile manhood of the town, and when we opened the show, the natives jammed the tent like Central Americans around the Spirit of St. Louis.

Side-Trap starts off the usual lecture on Melrah, but before he's half through, a big blond lad struts up and calmly mounts the platform. I take a look at this boy and he looks somewhat the familiar.

"I'd like to try out this chap," says the newcomer, in a gentle voice.

"Got mamma's permission?" kids Side-Trap.

"Papa's, too," retorts the suave gent.

"What's your name, Big Boy?" inquires Side-Trap.

"Oh, just call me Dennis."

"That's a good name for this business," admits Simpkins. "Er—live in Whiskers Cañon?"

"What's the difference where I live?"

"Not much," says Side-Trap. "Just wish to know where to send the leavings."

"Don't worry about me; get the other man's address," replies the big fellow.

"Who's your seconds?" asks Side-Trap.

"Don't need any," shoots back the challenger.

"Suppose you get knocked kicking?"

"Never heard of that."

While Sinclair give the busting babies their instructions, which no fighter ever listens to, anyway, Side-Trap hops out of the ring and comes up to me.

"Say, Doc," he whispers, "who does that guy remind you of?"

"Gene Tunney!" I replies, and busts the bell.

As usual, Melrah rushes out of his corner, with the humane intentions of murdering Dennis at once and promptly. He misses a left and right hook to Dennis' head, then goes into a clinch. Sinclair, acting as referee, breaks 'em and, on the getaway, Dennis shoots a snappy left jolt to Melrah's button. The big baboon shimmies his legs, and I get the idea that the blow must of done more than tickle him. Dennis follows up with a pretty bust to the kidneys, and Melrah grunts plenty and often. The big boy grins and, while they are sparring in the center of the ring, Sinclair leans over the ropes and says to me:

"My God, do you know who that man is?"

"Do you?" I counters.

"He's Gene Tunney, the heavyweight champion of the world!" he says, panting.

"Great!" I says. "I paid twenty bucks to see that guy fiddle around Jacko, the Dempsey, and now I'm seeing him at the right price."

"But this is serious!" whinnies Sinclair. "Er—suppose he should knock out Melrah? You know—ah—Melrah is not quite ripe for the champion yet. What's Tunney's object in doing this?"

"Maybe for fun," I says. "But I don't see the percentage. There ain't no million dollar gate receipts in *this* drum, that's a cinch."

The next moment a house or something lands on my head, and when I clear away the arms and legs, I note Melrah lying beside me. He's stretched out like a carpet, what I mean!

The crowd yelps long and lusty, and when the din subsides the big fellow says he will be pleased to receive the five hundred berries, in real money, no checks considered. I lead him over to the treasury wagon, with a mob at our heels, and tell Old Man Sullivan the glad tidings of cluck joy. In a positive daze, the Old Man counts out ten fifty-dollar bills and hands 'em to the winner. Next, he caustically remarks what he is going to do to both Melrah and DeLancey Sinclair, and walks over to the show to do it. Howsoever, when we reach the kid top, Melrah and his genial manager are as out of sight as palm trees in Greenland.

"What," yelps Mons. Sullivan, "d'yer think of that?"

"I think," I says, "that Melrah was not so good."

"Make it two," says he. "But listen, Doc, d'yer think that guy was really Gene Tunney? If so, what in the hell was he doing out here in the sticks?"

"Ask me another," I says and walks into the show.

Well, customers, we didn't get the end of that story until two months after; but since this ain't a serial, *you* won't have to wait that long.

SPEAKING of *hanswurst*, after the show closed for the season—only one lap ahead of the sheriff—I hopped a rattler for Chicago, en route to Times Square, in the land of New York. Changing at Chi, I bump into Ballyhoo Burns, who had just closed with the Sweeney-Goldberg ***Amalgamated Grifters Exposition Shows***. After we had settled comfortable in the Pullman, Ballyhoo begins to reminisce about the season's hot shots.

"We had been out about eight weeks," begins Ballyhoo, "when a guy named DeLancey Sinclair, claiming to be a explorer, joins out with the kid show, toting a dark bird named Melrah."

I am about to crash in with my own memoirs when I decide to listen first.

"Sinclair claims this Melrah is the greatest heavyweight of all time, and gets the boss to put up a prize of five hundred dollars to any towner who can remain four rounds with 'im. The first guy to try his luck is named Saddle-Back Clancy, and when Melrah knocks him kicking, the boss is tickled silly at the new attraction. At the next stand, a handsome looking lad climbs through the ropes, and says he would like to take a chance. He says his name was Dennis. A moment after the fight starts, Sinclair leans over the ropes and says to me, 'My God, do you know who that man is?'

"'Who?' I asks. And he says, 'He's Gene Tunney, the heavyweight champion of the world!' I am about to make some snappy reply, when the next moment Melrah gets knocked through the ropes, and lands on the sawdust, looking as stiff as a regiment of mummies. Of course, the natives yell for us to pay off the winner, and I take Dennis, Sinclair and Melrah over to the boss's wagon. At first, Sinclair says he don't want to face the boss, but I insist. I have a ace in the hole, and how!

"'Boss,' I says, when I get the three in the wagon, 'this man says he won the five hundred dollars, and he called to collect. He says his name is Dennis, but Sinclair claims he's Gene Tunney, in disguise.'

"'Well, well, well,' says the boss, 'ain't we got fun! So Melrah was knocked cuckoo by no less than Gene Tunney, hey? And poor Melrah can't speak a word of English, and was born in Indo-Hawawa, hey?' Then the boss turns to Sinclair, and goes on, 'And so *your* name is DeLancey Sinclair, the great explorer, hey?'

"At this point," goes on Ballyhoo, after getting a light from the train porter, "the boss fires a flower pot at Melrah and beans him; aims his cane at Sinclair and knocks him blooey. Melrah struggles from the floor and remarks, 'Hot damn! Feet, do yo' duty. Us is Harlem bound!'"

Ballyhoo paused and flecked the ashes off his cigaret.

"Er—how did you know the thing was framed?" I inquires, not too anxious, understand.

"A mere matter of luck," says Ballyhoo. "When the show played Jones Junction, Idaho, I took the opportunity of visiting some old friends at Clay City, ten miles away. While there I happened to see Sinclair, Dennis and Melrah chumming around together. What's more, I recognized Melrah as a colored lad who used to pilot the elevator in the Sweeney Arcade on Broadway, New York. Speaking of Melrah, just spell it backwards and you'll get 'Harlem,' where a great many colored folks live in New York. Anyway, when they asked to join the show, I tipped off the boss that it was prob'ly a frame-up to grab off a easy five hundred smackers, and so when the flop came, the boss was on the job."

"Who was Dennis and DeLancey Sinclair?" I asks.

"Search me!" says Ballyhoo. "But Dennis was a perfect ringer for Gene Tunney, and I don't mean perhaps. But say, can you imagine them stew bums trying to get away with anything like that among *troupers?*"

"Er—le's go into the diner," I says, "and coffee up."

Taps!

*A Complete Novelette*

# The MISSIONARY

### *A Romance of Conflict and Regeneration in the Savage Solomons*

By R. W. ALEXANDER

## CHAPTER I

"THE voice of God is loud in my ears," said Parson Dick stridently. "I go to convert the heathen."

He was ignored; but he went on, his blue eyes flaming, as if a silent audience hung upon his words.

"You men who live in sin, listen! Cast all evil from your houses, and walk straightly in the fear of God. Pander no more to the lusts of the body; be strong and righteous, denying evil. Else how can the poor heathen, seeing you, be more than what you are? How can the savage in his ignorance hearken to the word of God when you throw it to the ground and trample it? Shall he be greater than we, his masters? Shall he listen to the truths we spurn? Shall he keep to the path we cannot follow?"

He gripped the glass of gin in shaking fingers, emptied it at a gulp. A spot of color glowed in each cheek, and his eyes grew brighter. He looked about him in the smoke dim room, and found there subject matter for many a sermon. The men who came to Manatee's saloon were no saints. They were hard men, living a hard life, taking their pleasures as they came.

"Oh, men!" Parson Dick cried wistfully. "What is in evil that you love it, what in good that you abhor it? Set the feet straight, and the narrow path is as easy to walk as its broader sister."

"Aw, can it!" said a voice from the back of the room.

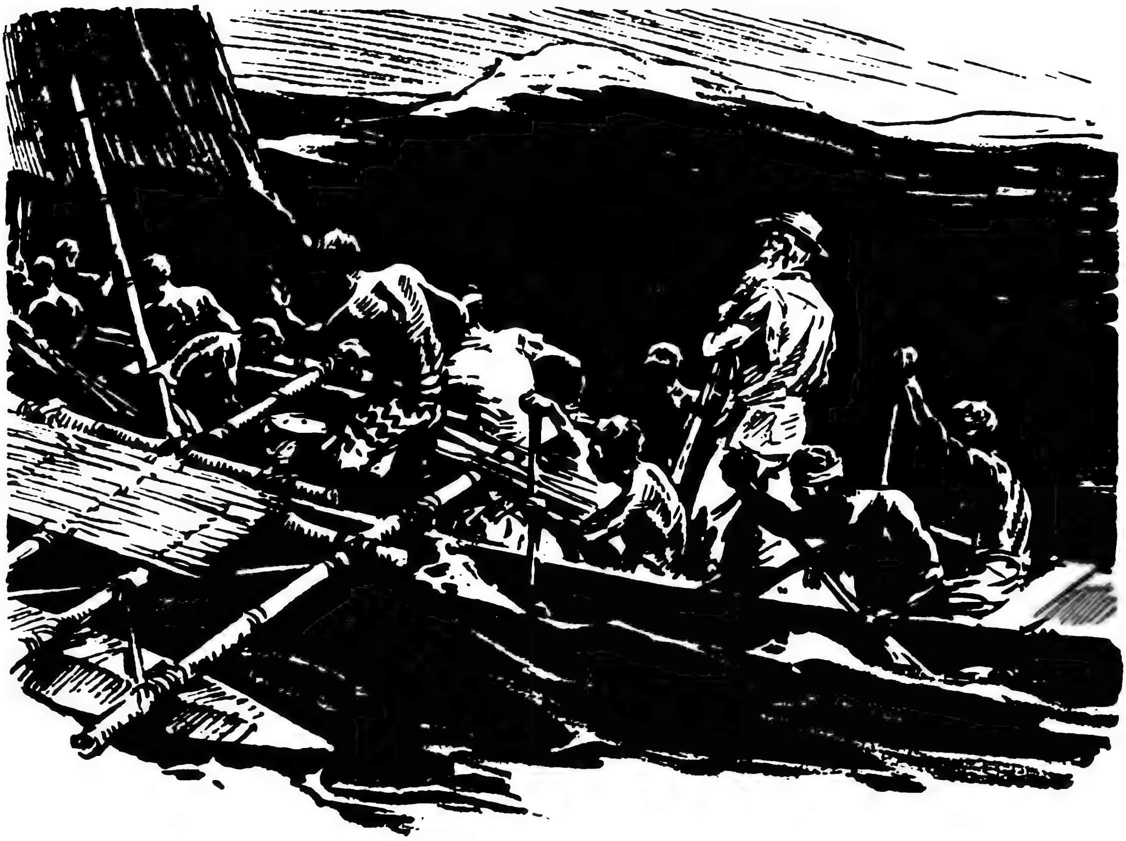
Parson Dick shoved his glass across the bar.

"More, Manatee."

"Maybe you've had about enough?" Manatee said. "Set us a good example, Parson."

"More!" the other snarled, and flung a coin after the glass.

Brooding, he sipped the drink. Manatee Smith watched him with uninterested eyes. Eight years now Maloba had known Parson Dick, the renegade deacon of uncertain denomination. For eight years he had talked of this conversion of the heathen, perpetually due, yet never reaching fruition. In Maloba Parson Dick remained, spending most of his time in Manatee's saloon, learning to drink gin like water.



And Maloba tolerated him, as it tolerated other characters as strange. For he was mad.

Parson Dick was mad. Men found that out by degrees; for most of the time he acted rationally, and spoke like a man of education and broad sympathies. He was widely read and widely traveled, and, sober or drunk, could speak most interestingly of his experiences. But after the first year he was seldom sober, and the strange, mad gleam came more often to his eyes, and words tumbled from his lips in an unceasing, bitter stream. Otherwise the drink had no effect upon him.

He was a tall, lean man, perhaps forty or a little more, thin faced, restless. He had fair hair and blue eyes, and the delicate hands of a musician. Dressed always in black, and carefully, he presented a strange contrast to the seamen among whom he moved—men whose attire for the most part consisted of soiled dungarees and a leather belt. It was an open secret that he received money from his relatives in Boston. Money to keep him in Maloba, many said. Though often he talked of returning home.

"There are more heathens in one State at home than in all these islands. I tell you, they need me there."

But he never went. He lived in Manatee's saloon, and drank his gin, and to an unappreciative audience preached of the conversion of the heathen.

He had strange dreams, and a world of ambition. He saw the natives worshipping at his command, and spoke frankly of the gratitude Heaven would hold for him that day.

"I will be as God in these fair isles, and men will step righteously for fear of me, and to earn my smile. Then all men will be equal, brown and white, and I will guide their feet . . . ."

So Parson Dick raved on, his blue eyes shining; and the rough seamen whom he reviled came to tolerate him as wise men tolerate the mad.

With Hallam it was different.

"Oh, brother," Parson Dick said, "you have sunk so low. . . ."

"I have sunk so low," Hallam said unpleasantly, "that I don't want to be reminded of it. I'd be obliged if you'd preach to someone else."

"Shame makes you speak like that,"

said Parson Dick eagerly. "Deep in your heart you are ashamed of what you have become."

Hallam, shrugging, walked away. He walked unsteadily, for he was very drunk, and the gin had taken command of his legs.

He was a big man, this Hallam, and young—no more than thirty. Once he had been captain of a schooner, and had ripped her bottom out on an unchartered reef. After that he had command of a brig, and she had burned to the water while her crew looked on from the boats. And after that Hallam had come to Maloba, a broken man.

Maloba, a few hundred miles southeast of Port Moresby, was a popular resort with failures of his kind. It had an easy tolerance for men who wished to drown their sorrows in gin, and many advantages besides. It was off the beaten track, which reduced to a minimum the chance of meeting acquaintances. And Hallam had a constant fear of meeting men he had known in his better days, when his name had been one treated with respect, and his word current coin in any port of the South Seas.

As he said, he had sunk so low that he did not wish to be reminded of it. He lived only for drink and the dreams it brought. For the past and the future he had no thought; the present was everything. Now and then he worked a little to earn money; for he was a man of his hands, and nothing was beyond him. He was a good man going bad, but that was his own affair, and the men of Maloba left him strictly alone. Only Parson Dick had the temerity to tell him of his shame, and Hallam had a short way with Parson Dick.

"I've had about enough of your gab. Shut your cursed mouth or there'll be trouble."

Parson Dick was wise, and restrained his eloquence when Hallam was about. And Hallam went his way, drinking himself to death, sleeping mostly where sleep found him, drowning in gin the memory of what he had once been, the thought of what he could be again. There was no weakness in his character, only a great self-pity that made him think himself the fool of luck, the plaything of fortune. Each day that passed strengthened his conviction that he had been abused by life.

MANATEE the saloonkeeper watched them both and pitied them a little, his pity mingled with contempt. He was a big man, brown from a life spent in the tropics, his blue eyes faded, serene with that serenity which comes from staring at a far, sun kissed horizon. Before settling in Maloba, Manatee had been a sailor, with a wife and daughter back in San Diego. But the wife had died, and the daughter had been taken over by relatives, and Manatee Smith had become a wanderer.

The years had flown more swiftly than he could have dreamed. He found himself grown old almost before he knew his youth was past.

"I'm gettin' lonesome," Manatee said; and he wrote to his wife's relatives, asking them to send on his daughter.

Their reply chilled him. Pearl, they said, was seventeen, and had not yet left school. In another year she would do so, to continue her studies at a university. Concluding, they inferred that Maloba was no place for a lady, young or old.

It was the first hint Manatee had received that his daughter had grown into a lady. It left him vaguely troubled, very definitely angry. He was no gentleman, as he understood the term. He dealt square with all men; but he never wore a collar, and swore fluently on the slightest provocation. The women he knew were women, not ladies. They were wonderful in their way, living here, helping their husbands, rearing their families with an invincible courage; but the niceties of ladyship were beyond them. They treated him as an equal, a thing no lady would do. They worked hard, and affected no gentility.

Manatee showed the letter to Parson Dick, the only educated man he knew.

"What the hell d'you know about that?" Manatee said.

Parson Dick read the letter, nodding thoughtfully.

"Well?" said the impatient Manatee.

"They are right," said Parson Dick. "They are quite right. The girl must have a proper education." He waved one hand at the huddle of huts sloping down to the blue water. "Here, what would she learn? Nothing but things she should never know, my friend. She would come by a knowledge of evil, and that is bad. She would come to tolerate evil, and that is worse. She would come to practice evil, and that is worst of all. Better that her ideas should be formed when she comes here, than that they should be still malleable, ready to be moulded by the first careless hand."

"Guess there's something in that," said Manatee. He spat at an ant crawling across the red sand outside the door of the saloon. "This ain't no young ladies' school, I admit."

Parson Dick grasped the opportunity to deliver a lengthy monologue on Maloba and the evils it sheltered. Only the offer of a drink brought his eloquence to an end.

That was before the arrival of Hallam. Four years later, Hallam came, and in a moment of expansiveness Manatee showed him the letter. Hallam snarled.

"You darned fool, Manatee!"

"How come?" said Manatee, on the defensive.

Hallam drummed one fist on the bar. "Is she your girl, or theirs? Hell, man, they'll make a simpering sissy of her, and when she comes out here she'll turn up her nose and disown you because you don't wear spats and a monocle, and put grease in your hair."

Manatee muttered sulphurously, his blue eyes savage. He had had some faint suspicion that that would be the way.

"If she does, by God, I'll whale it out of her! I'm not the man to stand for that."

Hallam sneered. He was in one of his black moods, sober, red of eye.

"Don't talk like a fool! You'll take anything she likes to give you, and kiss her little white feet. Here, give us a drink."

"You kinda think I should have gone for her?" Manatee said, shoving the glass across the counter.

Hallam drank thirstily.

"You should have gone and dragged her back by the hair, and laid into her with a whip when you had her here. I'll bet she never gutted a fish in her life."

"The hell you say!" said Manatee. "Guess I'll write again an' tell 'em to send her out pronto, eh?"

"Please yourself," said Hallam carelessly. "The harm's done now."

"It was all my own fault," Manatee said, dabbing at his forehead with a red bandana. Anger had made him sweat. "I asked the Parson, an' he said the girl should have an education, an' that the only education she'd get here would be the sort to send her straight to the bad. I thought maybe there might be somethin' in that; because she's my daughter, an' if she has any of my nature she's no saint. An' when a girl sets her mind on goin' to the bad there's no stoppin' her, not if you take the skin off her back."

So Manatee wrote a second time. And in reply, some ten months later, came no chilling letter, but Pearl Smith herself.

SHE landed from a trading schooner, and came slowly up the beach, staring about her with wide blue eyes. She was all in white, the slenderest, prettiest thing Maloba had seen within living memory. But there was a hint of anger in the twist of her red mouth, and of dismay in the expression of her eyes. Her luggage was landed after her, and stood there forlornly in the pitiless glare of the sun.

It was noon, and the heat was stifling. Maloba, as was its custom, slept while shadows fell straight. The captain of the schooner had warned her of this, advising her to wait; but she had been impatient. Now she regretted her impatience. The straggling street was deserted; in all the shadowed balconies she saw no sign of life. Only the *minah* birds strutted boldly in the sunshine, uttering their harsh cry, scarcely bothering to flutter from her path.

As luck would have it, she saw Mark Hallam first, a long, loose figure stretched beneath a mass of vine. Approaching, she looked down at him while he slept, and her nose wrinkled in contempt. He wore blue dungarees, held at the waist by a Malay sarong of all the colors of the rainbow, but faded and torn. Above the waist he was naked, his chest and arms a mass of knotted muscle, brown as his face. From his face a battered Panama had fallen to one side, displaced by some uneasy movement of his head. His mouth was open, and he snored.

Gently, at first, the girl stirred him with one foot. He moved and muttered something, but slept soundly on. She stirred him again, her anger rising. He sat up swiftly enough then. His gray eyes blazed at her.

"Who the hell d'you think you are?"

She stepped back a pace in sheer astonishment. Hallam rose lithely to his feet, stood glowering at her. Erect, he seemed bigger than ever, deeper of chest, more massive of shoulder. But she was in no mood to admire his build.

"I wished to ask the way to Smith's saloon," she said coldly.

"Oh!" said Hallam. "You're Manatee's daughter, eh?"

"I don't see how that concerns you!" she flared.

Hallam laughed.

"I most humbly beg your pardon" he said. "But when a lady kicks me in the ribs, I feel at liberty at least to know who she is. However, it will be an honor to show you Mr. Smith's saloon.'

She was suspicious of his turn of humor, and resentful of it, as he led the way. He knew she was uncertain of him, and derived a malicious pleasure from her uncertainty. He found pleasure, too, in anticipation of the shock that awaited her.

Yet the emotion he felt keenest was pity for Manatee; bluff, hearty Manatee, square dealer and good fellow, but unquestionably no gentleman.

"There," Hallam said, one hand out, "is Mr. Smith's saloon."

She stiffened, and her mouth hardened; but otherwise she gave no sign to tell how cruelly she was hit. Manatee's saloon looked no more than it was—a gin palace. It was like Manatee himself, plain and unpretentious, essentially a man's saloon as he was essentially a man. There was no gilding about it, nothing to hide its ugliness, no attempt to gloss over its character. It stood there, long and squat beneath the palms, like some gorged monster sleeping through the noonday heat, stark and unashamed.

"Thank you," said the girl quietly.

Hallam was surprised. He had expected something different, some hot, contemptuous outburst, followed by tears of anger and disappointment. But she took it calmly, with a squaring of her chin. She was still Manatee's daughter, then; they had not changed her nature, much as they may have tampered with her ideas, Hallam thought. She had all her father's stubborn spirit. But Hallam was curious to see how she would react to her meeting with Manatee himself.

"Thank you," she said again, watching him with level eyes.

HALLAM was amused. She had guessed at his curiosity, it seemed; observed it in his manner.

"This way," he said, leading her up the three low steps, into the shadow of the balcony, through the open door into the saloon beyond. Liquor had been spilled upon the floor; the air was heavy with the stench of it. A Malay house boy slept in one corner of the room, his chin a scarlet smear of betelnut juice. And seated at the bar, head fallen forward on it, cradled in his arms, was Manatee.

"And that," said Hallam, "is Mr. Smith himself."

"Thank you," said the girl again, obviously waiting for him to go.

"I should like to offer a little advice," said Hallam. "Your father is a man of hasty temper. Best step carefully."

"What do you mean?"

Hallam waved one hand.

"Don't be too candid about all this. Of course, we're pigs and all that; but it might be as well to keep your contempt to yourself. That's all."

He turned, went out. He had reached the door when he heard Manatee's roar, and a little cry from the girl. Maybe there was good stuff in her, after all, he thought. If there was, now was the time for her to show it.

Manatee came to the door, bellowing, the girl on his arm, his face aflame.

"Hey, boys!" His voice carried through the little settlement, and heads appeared at doors and windows. "Come an' see my gal! Come an' drink her health! Drinks on the house, boys!"

They came flocking down the sun white street, a motley crowd, tousled, heavy eyed. And, while Hallam looked amusedly on, Manatee in absurd pride showed them his girl. She hated it, hated it with the whole passionate strength of her nature. Hallam knew that from the spot of color in each cheek, her narrowed eyes, the foot that tapped impatiently. Idly, he wondered why she stood it. To please Manatee, he supposed. Yes, there must be good stuff somewhere in her.

Manatee was more restrained that night when Hallam went in to drink himself to a stupor. Hallam guessed he had had some words with the girl. Manatee himself confirmed that a little later.

"She thinks I'm dirt, Mark," Manatee said sadly. "I'm not good enough for her to wipe her feet on. I should be ashamed to run a place like this, an' to associate with fellers like you an' the rest of the boys. Can't I remember I'm her father? I guess I can, an' I'll make her remember it, too, if she keeps on that tack much longer."

Hallam laughed.

"She'll grow used to it, Manatee."

"That's what the Parson said. He said she'd grow used to it, an' then tolerate it, an' then get to like it herself." He flared out suddenly: "Hell, there's no harm in a man drinkin', is there?"

Hallam offered no opinion on that.

Parson Dick came in later on in the night, and reiterated his unswerving intention to convert the heathen without further delay. Roused by his voice, the girl appeared, and stood in the shadow of the doorway, watching him with curious eyes. Perhaps it was her presence that made Parson Dick forget the discretion he was wont to use when addressing Hallam.

"Oh, man of sin!" he cried. "See to your mode of life, and swiftly mend it; for it is evil, and evil is abhorrent in the eyes of God."

Hallam rose, lunged at him, knocked him sprawling.

"Easy, easy!" Manatee said, stepping out from behind the bar.

Parson Dick rose, dabbing at his nose, which bled, with one sleeve of his black jacket.

"He knows not what he does," he said.

Hallam stormed.

"I told you to keep your cursed mouth shut! And I meant what I said. Now I say it again, and you'd best remember it! I'm sick to death of your canting!"

Parson Dick leaned against the bar, still trying to check the flow of blood from his nose.

"Have you a little rag?" he said to Manatee. "And a glass of water."

Unexpectedly, the girl brought him water in a bowl, and a towel. He smiled at her, and his smile was singularly sweet.

"They are men of violence," he said, as if in explanation and pardon of Hallam's action. "Their only argument is the argument of force."

"The brute!" she said in low tones, with a glance towards Hallam, sullenly drinking at his table.

Parson Dick reproved her gently.

"I was in the wrong. I should not have spoken to him so harshly, knowing his quick temper."

"My father should turn him out!" said the girl hotly, and Parson Dick smiled.

She told her father so that night.

"Now you listen to me," said Manatee. "I've had about enough from you, an' I don't mind who knows it. I'll thank you not to start givin' me advice about my saloon."

"Hallam is a drunken beast," said the girl.

"Maybe he is," said Manatee, "an' maybe he's not. That's neither here nor there. Hallam keeps himself to himself, an' the Parson doesn't. If Hallam had a nasty temper, he'd have killed the Parson long ago, an' nobody'd have blamed him, or been sorry. They're the only educated men in Maloba, an' they hate each other like pizen. You better have nothin' to do with either of 'em. They're dangerous. I'd sooner light a fire with sticks of dynamite than touch Hallam on the raw. An' the Parson's dangerous because he's mad."

"Mad?" said the girl incredulously.

Manatee nodded.

"Mad as a hatter. An' when a man's mad he doesn't know what he's doin'. An' when a man doesn't know what he's doin' he's dangerous, an' darn dangerous. If Parson Dick knew what he was doin' he'd leave Hallam alone, an' mighty quick. Hallam interferes with nobody—he's drinkin' himself to death as quiet an' peaceful as a baby drinkin' milk, with no trouble to himself nor anyone else. The Parson comes in here every night an' drinks as much as Hallam, an' tells us we're all sinners, an' settin' a bad example to the poor unfortunate heathen, an' nearly drives us mad with his talk. So if I turn anyone out, it'll be Parson Dick."

He watched her as she sat there, through the open window staring into the purple night, and chuckled inwardly. Her mouth had an obstinate set, and her chin was prominent. Manatee thought that a good sign. He liked her to have a will of her own.

"Then the Parson, as you call him," she said, "doesn't mean what he says? He doesn't act as he preaches?"

"About convertin' the heathen?" said Manatee.

She nodded.

"Well, he's here eight years now, an' he hasn't converted anyone yet, not even himself."

"I think he has the spirit, all the same," she said. "The spirit and the will. All he wants is a start."

"He better lay off Hallam," Manatee said, "or he'll get a start, all right. An' you better lay off them both."

But the girl had discovered an interest in life.

"You goin' home by the next boat?" Manatee asked her humorously that night as she went to her room.

She shook her head, smiling.

"No. Now that I'm here, I'll stick it out."

In the evenings that followed she talked much with Parson Dick, and he found in her a sympathetic audience. She could see in him no strain of madness, only a certain hesitancy to set about his work of conversion among the heathen. She told Manatee so, and he swore, ignoring her shocked protests.

"You're monkeyin' with dynamite, Pearl, an' you're too cocksure to know it! Leave the Parson alone or there'll be hell to pay."

She laughed.

"I'm converting him, and he'll convert the heathen."

"Convert your grandmother!" said Manatee. "He'll hear the voice of God again, an' rush off to some island where they're still deaf in that direction. An' d'you know what'll happen him there? He'll be hatcheted, or maybe tortured to death, and tied out on the reef a while to soften up his joints. Then they'll bring him in, an' roast him in a long oven, an' eat him. An' the chief'll smoke his head, an' add it to his collection. An' that'll be the only way Parson Dick will convert the heathen."

She shuddered a little, but did not take him seriously, though he meant every word.

So, it was a fortnight after she came that Parson Dick left Maloba for the Solomon Islands, to convert the heathen. He had other plans, too; but these he did not tell her. That was just as well for her peace of mind.

PARSON DICK gone, the girl turned her attention to Hallam, bent on his reform. But here she met with stiffer opposition. Hallam frankly sneered at her, his gray eyes contemptuous.

"You're doing this to amuse yourself, not for the good of my immortal soul."

She had all her father's fiery temper and outspokenness. This spirit of hers was the one trait that made Hallam tolerate her even as much as he did. She said, now, something about his immortal soul that would have shocked Parson Dick.

"It's your mortal body I'm thinking of, you fool! You're degenerating from a man into a gin sodden wreck, and in your heart you know it. Haven't you courage enough to start again?"

"What's the use?" he said, rather wearily. "What's the use of fighting when there's no reward at the end?"

"There's the reward of your own self-respect," said the girl.

He laughed.

"You're a coward!" she said in contempt. "You're afraid of the uphill climb."

"Show me the reward," he answered lightly, "and I'll climb fast enough."

"I can't show you any reward if you're blind to it yourself. You were a man once—you know what it's like. Isn't it worth fighting to be a man again?"

"Show me the man who says I'm not one," he said a little viciously, "and I'll break his neck. As for you, you're doing this only to have another scalp hanging at your belt. You have the Parson's; but you won't have mine. I tell you that now, to save you trouble." He raised his glass, his eyes mocking her. "To your better sense!"

"To your better courage!" she said bitingly, and left him.

He gazed after her, a sneer on his lips. He liked her, and her contempt stung him. He knew himself still a man, though the gin threatened to sap the strength both of his mind and of his body. There, he thought, his eyes on her slim figure, was a prize worth fighting for, worth winning.

As he refilled the glass, his hand trembled. An instant he hesitated, before drinking deep.

## CHAPTER II

ACROSS tumbled blue water, while the boat was being lowered, Parson Dick stared at the island of Kofea, one of the lesser Solomons.

"God is good," he said devoutly.

"This is plain suicide, and darned unpleasant suicide at that," said the captain of the trader.

"I go armed with the Word," said Parson Dick.

"Better bring a gun as well," said the ungodly skipper.

Parson Dick pulled open his long coat, showed him two Colt's in leather holsters.

"There may be men who would not listen to the Word," he said, and grinned, showing his teeth. The light of madness flickered in his eyes.

"It's your own funeral," the captain said, and watched him depart for the beach, eager blue eyes on the island ahead.

Parson Dick landed, and his few stores were landed after him. The boat came back, leaving him there, a lonely black figure on the golden beach.

The bush, deep green and shadow pitted, looked innocent enough. But Parson Dick had been long enough in the Islands to know that no man is craftier, more savage, or more treacherous than the Solomon Islander. As he stood there, he knew he was being watched, though he could see no sign of any watcher. He spread wide his arms, spoke sonorously to the audience hidden there in the silent bush.

"All men are brothers," he cried; and went on to prove that while this was true, he himself was something beyond the ordinary run of mortals, fit to be regarded as an elder brother.

The men in the bush listened uncomprehendingly, catching a word here and a word there, stirring not an inch until the schooner filled away and vanished swiftly eastwards. They had a deep rooted distrust of schooners.

Then they moved, gathering about the Parson in a silent circle—lithe brown men, naked for the most part, their hair fluffed out with yellow clay, hatchets and knives at their waists, and here and there an old Snider loosely held. They were suspicious of a trap, and did not approach too close. This was something they could not understand; and that alone saved Parson Dick. They were still animals in this distrust of anything beyond their comprehension.

Parson Dick ignored them. His glance went beyond them, over them, around them. It was as if he spoke to the nodding palms, the beach, the darting beetles.

"All men are brothers; nor is the white greater than the brown, nor the brown greater than the black. The world is for all who tread righteously in the path of God. . . ."

He spoke for three hours, until his shadow slanted long behind him; and the watching natives marveled. Their fear of him was gone, and as yet only wonder had come to take its place. That was well for Parson Dick. Perhaps, with the cunning of the mad, he had reckoned it would be so. Perhaps he had reckoned on wonder and curiosity keeping in check their murderous instincts.

At the end of that time he relapsed into *bêche-de-mer*, of which he was a master, and the savages began to understand the drift of his remarks, and pressed closer.

That night Parson Dick slept in the native village, in a hut set apart for him by the chief. He slept soundly, for he had no fear; and the two brown men who squatted silently on each side of the door, with orders to hatchet him if he emerged, listened till dawn to the sound of his even breathing, and were disappointed.

That day he spoke at great length to the chief, and N'ga was impressed. He was impressed more by the dancing light in Parson Dick's eyes than by his remarkable eloquence, which enabled him to speak from early morning until the heat of the day set in. He was impressed, too, by Parson Dick's claims to greatness, which were many and varied.

Parson Dick spoke of a new religion, a religion to sweep across the Islands like fire across dry grass, having its headquarters here at Kofea. He made no secret of the fact that of this religion he was to be high priest; and the medicine man of the village grew uneasy. He spoke swiftly to the chief, who thought fit to modify his remarks when translating them to Parson Dick. Even so, they were offensive in the extreme.

"Man," said Parson Dick to the witch-doctor, who watched him with restless black eyes, "in this vale of tears it is the will of God that each human being have an allotted span of life, some short, some long, but all ending definitely when the finger of God is raised. I think you have lived your life." He shot once with one of the big Colt's, and the medicine man pitched limply forward.

IT WAS a bold stroke, and because of its very boldness it worked. For an instant, while the startled watchers awaited some manifestation of dreadful vengeance from the dead man, silence held the village and the clearing. Then the old chief laughed, and took snuff from one of his wives.

"That fella all wind belong belly," he said, and sneezed. He had other remarks to pass about the dead man, remarks he would have trembled to think of passing two minutes previously.

"His time had come," said Parson Dick. Unostentatiously, he replaced the expended cartridge, and slid the gun back into its holster. Then he squatted down at the old chief's feet, and began to talk, his shadow black about him.

In a week he had them in the hollow of his hand; in a fortnight they were his slaves. He had fired the lust of spoil that was their ambition, had set them to dreaming dreams. For men with brains so poorly developed as were theirs, that was a dangerous pastime. They had no desires beyond their appetites, and their dreams were dreams of murder and rapine. The vision he saw, and tried to share, came to them, changed utterly, distorted beyond recognition. His dream-kingdom was a kingdom of beauty; theirs was a kingdom of horror. And he, raving on, found them an enthusiastic audience, and thought his Maker granted light to these poor savages for the betterment of the world.

He was, at first, uncertain how to start, until he noticed the great wooden idols set here and there in clearings about the village. These he burned, while the savages watched open mouthed, silent with fear. When nothing happened, their faith in him was infinite.

Again he found himself at a loss. Until a thought came to him, and he saw his path set clear ahead.

"I must find me a partner," he said; and the old chief nodded without comprehending.

It was no coincidence that Parson Dick thought first of the girl who had set this great scheme to whirling in his head, where for so many years it had lain quietly. The vision of her had come to him often since he had left Maloba, visiting him at night, and even in the white glow of noonday sunshine. She saw with his eyes, she dreamed his dreams. She was one with him, his preordained mate.

There was, in a long hut in the village, a war canoe that had been built in the old free days, a vessel carved from the trunk of a single giant tree, with room for eighty paddlers, sitting two abreast. Its high, curved stem and stern were inlaid with mother-o'-pearl in the design of an unspeakable god, and in places the wood was stained where men had died. It had known raids ending in slaughter and rapine, and all the horrors of inter-island warfare. It had known the cutting-out of ships, and the moans of captives. Then, when the white man came in ever increasing numbers, when the killing of one was avenged swiftly and mercilessly, the war canoe had been taken ashore and carefully sheltered in the long hut in readiness for the day when it should again be launched.

Something of its saga came to Parson Dick as he stood looking at the dark vessel; and this strange man shuddered. He ordered the canoe to be made seaworthy without delay, and was short when N'ga questioned him eagerly.

"I go to seek my bride."

In a week all was ready, and Parson Dick chose eighty men. While his back was turned, under the supervision of the chief they cut a young girl's throat, and held her so that her blood washed the bow of the canoe. Then the vessel was launched, and stores put aboard. The eighty embarked. Parson Dick followed. From the stern he delivered a short sermon, enjoining the tribe to step righteously while he was absent; then at a sign from him the paddles bit deep, and the war canoe gathered way.

"God is good," said the blue eyed man.

The canoe went north and west unfalteringly. The first night they sheltered in the lagoon of an atoll, sleeping aboard, starting again at dawn. The second night they lay at sea, watches set.

That third day a schooner stormed down on them under full sail, her sharp bow headed straight for the canoe. Parson

Dick stood up, and waved and shouted, and after a moment the schooner swung aside. But as she foamed past, her skipper yelled at them.

"What the hell d'you mean by comin' out in a craft like that?"

The dignity of Parson Dick's reply was lost in the snarl of torn water, and the schooner went on, leaving them tossing in her wake.

ON THE third night they saw the lights of Maloba, and Parson Dick thanked God. His eighty paddlers, too, were grateful, for never before had they ventured so far afield as this.

They hung in the offing while one by one the lights went out, until but a few remained. Then Parson Dick moved his hand, and the paddles dipped silently.

"No killing!" Parson Dick said as they landed.

Forty stayed in the canoe, and forty went with him. In utter silence they passed up the street, only the starlight on their weapons to betray them. Outside Manatee's they halted, and Parson Dick went on alone.

He gained the doorway, and the light from within revealed him. The girl saw him, uttered a little cry. Manatee saw him, and swore.

He went forward into the room, sat down at a table, beckoned the girl to him. She came eagerly, anxious to know what chance had brought him back to Maloba.

"I have converted the heathen," said Parson Dick triumphantly. "They have heard the voice of God, and hearkened to it."

"I'm so glad!" said the girl in a low voice, her eyes glowing.

"The credit is yours," said Parson Dick. He stretched his arm across the table, touched her hand, held it firmly. "Come with me, and together we will bring the Word to these poor savages. . . ."

She was pale, a little frightened.

"I cannot do that," she said gently.

"You are everything to me!" said Parson Dick, breathing quickly. "With you by my side, no task would be too hard, no triumph great enough. Come back with me and share my kingdom."

"No!" She rose; but he still held her hand.

"Then why—why did you send me from you?"

"You were wasted here," she said, trying to free her hand.

If Manatee saw that he refused to let her go, there would be trouble.

"At least," he said, "you must see some of my converts." His voice was very pleading.

She hesitated.

"Are they outside?"

"At the door. I could not bring them in."

She felt the danger, but could not see it. A glance about showed her men she knew were armed. Her father leaned over the bar, watching her with a quizzical grin; hidden from sight, two revolvers lay within reach of his hands. There was no danger—there could not be.

"You must excuse this pride in my poor work," Parson Dick said as they walked towards the door.

"You have a right to be proud." Her voice was unsteady, annoyingly out of control. "You've been wonderful."

He smiled.

"What I have done is nothing to what I mean to do."

They were in the doorway, shadows facing them. But in the shadows the girl caught the glint of steel, and drew a little back.

"You're not afraid?" said Parson Dick, gently reproving. "Come, you must meet them."

She saw more clearly now, and the number of the silent savages gave her some surprise.

"I think I must go back," she said, trying to disengage her hand. The men in there seemed very far away.

"They will not touch you," said Parson Dick. "Can you not trust me? I tell you, not one of them shall lay a finger on your dress."

She was being silly, she told herself; there was no danger. She went slowly down the steps. The savages closed about her.

"Do not be afraid," said Parson Dick gently. "No harm will befall you."

"I must go back," she breathed. "Let me, please!"

"No harm will befall you," Parson Dick said again, and slipped a hand over her mouth. She struggled; but his arms were strong as steel about her body. He lifted her easily, carried her. The silent brown men moved with them down the street.

ONLY one man saw them go, and that man was Mark Hallam. Where the street swung down towards the beach he crouched in the shadow of a bush. The savages went padding by, stringing out as the path narrowed. Hallam rose behind the last of them, crooked an arm about his neck, held him silent and powerless while the others vanished. He took the light hatchet from him, flung it into the bush; stretched him on the ground and sat on him.

"Where you all fella belong?" he whispered.

The brown man tried to yell, but Hallam choked the sound back into his throat, and waited patiently until he heard the steady dip of paddles from the sea. Then he released his pressure on the muscular throat, and the savage gasped and ceased to writhe.

"Where you all fella belong?" Hallam said again.

The savage whispered a word. Hallam, who knew something of the Melanesian tongues, recognized the name of the island. He jerked the man to his feet, pushed him back along the path, along the street, until they came to Manatee's. There Hallam forced him up the steps and into the lighted room.

A chorus of voices greeted him. A Solomon Islander was very different from the tamed natives about Maloba.

"Where in hell'd you get that?" Manatee demanded.

"Outside," Hallam said with a jerk of his head. "They came with the Parson, about sixty or seventy of them."

"The hell you say!" exploded Manatee. "For what?"

"Your girl."

The big man became quiet, seemed to lose a little of his color.

"They took her?"

"Yes."

Mechanically, Manatee wiped at the bar with a cloth he held.

"The Parson's behind that," he said.

"What are you going to do, man?" Hallam said, growing impatient.

"Do?" said Manatee. He seemed dazed, bewildered. "What *can* I do?"

"Do what you like, and be damned to you—I'm going after them and bring her back," Hallam said, and swore mightily.

"An' me!" said voice after voice from the men crowded round.

Manatee seemed abruptly to recover from the shock.

"By God!" he said, "I'll tear the life out of him, the dirty blackguard! You sure they're gone, Mark?"

"They went in a canoe," said Hallam. "I had no time to do anything, and anyway it's better to follow them and get them at sea."

"Which way've they gone?" said a voice.

"They came from Kofea. If we start right out we should catch them in the morning."

"There's nothing to start in," said Manatee. "There's nothing bigger nor a canoe here."

Hallam thought.

"We can get Rafferty's sloop. She'll do," he said.

Rafferty lived ten or twelve miles up-coast.

"If he's not out in her," said Manatee, fear in his voice.

"Pray he's not, for the girl's sake!" Hallam snarled. "Here, you." He beckoned one of the Malay boys from the edge of the circle. "Run to Rafferty's, and tell him to bring his sloop here before sunup. Get that?"

"Aye, sah!" said the boy eagerly.

"And tell him to bring his guns with him. Now *git!*"

The boy vanished into the night.

"It'll take him an hour and a half," Hallam said. "Rafferty'll be here in three hours, with luck. That'll be two hours before sunup. Suppose we all meet here at sunup? It's best to get a bit of sleep in before we start."

"Meanwhile," Manatee said, "I guess I'll finish off that nigger." He picked a revolver from beneath the bar. "Stand aside, gents."

"Don't be a fool!" Hallam said, stepping in front of the savage. "Don't you think I'd have killed him long ago if he wouldn't be useful later on? Put that gun away and go get some sleep."

"Guess you're right," Manatee said submissively. "I'll lock him up somewhere, an' get a couple of the boys to keep an eye on him."

HALLAM went out into the night, to the hut he had built himself beneath the palms. Here he lit a lantern swinging from the roof, and glanced about him. A bottle and a glass stood on the table; his hands went out towards them. Then he checked himself. He had no time for that—he must be sober when the sun came up. But he was very thirsty, and a drink would steady him. He took the bottle and the glass, hesitated again, then flung them with a curse through the open door. He quenched his thirst with water.

There was a sailor's chest, oaken, brass-bound, beneath the table. He dragged this into the light, opened it. It held everything he owned, all he had saved from the life that had once been his. Clothes, and books, a chart or two, a painting of the first vessel he had captained. A few curiosities, picked up here and there in his wanderings. A Malay *kris* that had been warm with his blood. He tossed them all aside in careless confusion, until at length he found what he sought, two heavy Colt's revolvers.

He handled them, tried them one after the other. They worked as smoothly as the day he had bought them. Delving deeper, he found a box of ammunition, and filled the chambers. The act seemed to afford him some secret satisfaction, for he smiled. Then, blowing out the lantern, he lay down to rest.

Sleep persistently eluded him. In the darkness about him he saw the face of Manatee's girl, blue eyes angry, little chin square. That was as he had seen her most often, annoyed by some remark of his, or by his obstinate refusal to reform. And beside her he saw the face of Parson Dick, thin, eager, in its way handsome.

Lying there, he thought about Parson Dick. For eight long years his madness had remained inoffensive beyond his perpetual eloquence; then abruptly it had taken this turn. The girl was responsible for that. Without her influence Parson Dick would never have stirred from Maloba. Logically, the girl was to blame for her own predicament. But Hallam knew that would not prevent his killing Parson Dick.

He wondered why. It seemed curious that this affair had stirred him so deeply as to allow him calmly to contemplate and decide upon the taking of a life. Strange, indeed.

Of course, Parson Dick deserved death. Any man who brought a white girl into the Solomons deserved death. Hallam knew to an inch how far the brown men could be trusted. They gave you presents, and hatcheted you when you stooped to examine them. They were the craftiest devils he knew. For all his madness, Hallam thought, Parson Dick would be a child in their hands.

The long night passed slowly while he thought of Parson Dick and the girl and the lithe brown men in whose power they both lay. His eyes were still open when the dawn came, and he rose. Outside his hut a stream bubbled down to the sea, and here he dipped his head and splashed himself until the water gleamed like diamonds on his naked chest.

The guns in his belt, he went along to Manatee's. He found the men of the settlement there, armed and ready. Red-headed Rafferty had arrived with his sloop, thirsting for fight. Manatee was very silent, very deadly. The others all spoke at once, giving their opinions as to the best course to pursue. Quietly, as by right, Hallam took command.

"Listen!" he said. "Firstly, we can't all go. Ten or a dozen should be enough; and someone must stay behind to take care of the women. I think that's a job for the married men."

A murmur of agreement rose.

"Secondly," Hallam said, "each man must be well armed, and have plenty of ammunition."

"I'll answer for that," Manatee said. "If any man's short of shells, let him just step up an' take what he wants." Bending down, he heaved box after box of cartridges on to the bar.

"Thirdly," said Hallam, "we'll want a few cases of dynamite."

"That's on the sloop," said Rafferty. "I keep it for fishing."

"That's all, apart from the grub. You'll see to that, Manatee?"

Manatee nodded.

They were under way in half an hour, ten of them. The wind was light, but Hallam thought it would strengthen as the day wore on.

"If it doesn't," he said to Manatee, "we won't see them today."

"You don't expect to, anyway," Manatee said without looking at him. "You don't expect to catch them this side Kofea."

Hallam was surprised.

"What makes you think that?"

"All these preparations." Manatee waved his hand. "Dynamite, an' ammunition, an' bringin' the nigger with us, so as he can be useful when we hit the island. I'm no fool, Mark. Neither's the Parson, though he's mad as a hatter. He'll beat it for Kofea hard as the paddlers can bring him; an' these chaps can stick the hell of a pace when they're put to it. He'll get there before us, too. You know that."

"I'm trying to persuade myself the wind will freshen," Hallam confessed. "If it does, everything's simple. We can run down the canoe, and pick the girl from the water. If it doesn't, they'll reach the island first. It means more trouble for us, that's all."

"An' what about my gal?" Manatee said.

"I'm trying not to think about her. But anyway, I don't believe the Parson will mistreat her. He may be mad; but he's still white. All I'm afraid of is that the niggers will turn and kill them both."

"You're a liar," said Manatee calmly.

"I am!" said Hallam; and for the first time Manatee had some slight indication of the emotion seething in him. "I am! But if there's so much as a hair of her head harmed, I'll kill Parson Dick and every nigger on the island, man, woman, and child!" His eyes blazed, the knuckles of his hands were white. "I mean it, Manatee!"

"Guess you do," Manatee said, eyeing him curiously.

"We'd better have a leader," Hallam said, controlling himself.

"That's you," said Manatee. "You know the niggers better than any of us. You had more'n one scrap with them before you came to Maloba. You know the way they fight, an' the way to fight 'em. You're head of this outfit."

Hallam nodded. That suited him well enough.

They made little way that day, for the wind held light. At sunset it fell completely, and the sloop dipped her nose to rollers from the east, and wallowed lazily.

"Luck's against us," Hallam said, and swore.

"It'll turn," Manatee said. "It must."

But all next day the calm held, until at evening a little wind sprang up, ruffling the dark water. It blew like that, in long, gentle breaths, until on the fifth day they saw Kofea ahead.

"PADDLE!" said Parson Dick, sitting grim faced in the stern, his eyes, filled with a mad light, fixed steadily on the expanse of sea ahead.

The girl opened weary eyes, gazed at the blue sky and the rollers swinging past; turned to gaze at the toiling savages, and shuddered. The man who sat above her smiled, put one hand tenderly to her hair.

"Fear nothing," he said.

She knew now that what her father had said was true; Parson Dick was mad. She had only herself to blame for what had happened. Her father had warned her that she played with fire; she could not cry to him for help when she was burned. If she was to escape, it must be by her own effort; but she saw little chance of escape, and the flame of hope within her died to a feeble glow.

She found herself pursuing an idle line of speculation. She had reformed Parson Dick in a few short weeks, and this was the result. Given a longer time, could she have done the same with Hallam? And, if so, what form would his reaction have taken?

That was a question difficult to answer. No two men could be more different than Hallam and Parson Dick. Therefore, they would react differently to her influence. That was obvious enough. But then, Hallam was an unknown quantity, and she had sensed in him a force differing totally from the force in Parson Dick. The force of the one lay in action, of the other in eloquence. Hallam, then, if her reasoning was correct, would react to her influence with a burst of feverish energy. What form that energy would take she could not even guess.

She fell asleep, and when she awoke again it was evening. But otherwise nothing seemed to have changed. Parson Dick still sat erect in the stern, now and then turning to scan the horizon to the west; the natives still paddled with that steady, monotonous stroke.

"Where are we going?" she asked for the first time.

"To our kingdom," he said, and smiled. "Others call it the island of Kofea, but you and I know better."

"And when we get there?"

He leaned a little forward.

"We marry."

She put one hand to her breast, and tried to smile.

Parson Dick went on, almost as if in excuse for himself.

"You are my destined mate," he said. "You it was who made me see that this dream I had for years could become reality at the lifting of a finger. From triumph to triumph we will go on, from conquest to conquest. . . ."

He painted her a glowing picture of the future, a picture in which she figured largely. With her by his side he would do wonderful things, overcoming all obstacles. She listened, and in pity crushed back the angry words that rose to her lips at some of his prophecies. This was not the man who talked, but the wanton spirit that had taken possession of him, mind and body.

By the time the green bulk of Kofea rose from the sea ahead, she had given up hope of rescue. The sea astern was as barren as the sky, as innocent of sail. She was not surprised; for the natives had paddled steadily, sleeping only a few hours each night; and the wind had dropped to the merest breath.

"We are safe!" Parson Dick said, and seemed to expect her to share his relief.

The canoe had been seen, and the beach was crowded. Men and women dashed into the water, dragged the long craft half its own length ashore. Parson Dick stepped out, reached up his hands to the girl. The natives watched in silence while he lifted her to the firm sand.

"Welcome!" he said softly.

He watched while the canoe was dragged further up the beach. Then by a winding path he led her to the village, showing her, proudly, here and there, the charred fragments of the idols he had burned.

"These should be preserved," he said, laughing. "They are the first spoils of the long fight, and as such must have a certain interest for posterity."

He brought her to the old chief, squatting naked before his hut.

"N'ga," he said simply, "here is my bride."

The monkey faced man grinned uncomprehendingly, and Parson Dick repeated his statement in a more intelligible form, which luckily the girl did not understand.

"Tomorrow will be the ceremony," Parson Dick said.

"Tomorrow?" Only by an effort she kept the dismay from her voice. "That is—very soon"

"You would not have it delayed?" he said in some reproach.

She was thinking furiously. She must have time more time than that, allowed her. Tomorrow was only a few hours away, and in those few hours she could do nothing.

"No," she said, and laughed. "But I thought you would give the people time to gather, and prepare a feast and a holiday . . . And you could not do that if the wedding was tomorrow."

"True," he said thoughtfully. "It is a great event, and these poor heathens must be made to know it for such. For with this wedding their freedom is born, rising phoenix-like from the fire of our love. . ."

She listened patiently, and, hating him, she pitied him, for his dream was a dream magnificent, and it could never become real.

## CHAPTER III

THEY left the sloop in a little cove, and by devious paths made their way towards the village, ten desperate men led by a terrified native.

It was night, and the sky ahead reflected a ruddy glow where the village lay; this they saw in places where the jungle thinned, and knew that great fires had been lit for some rejoicing. And as they went, the throb of drums greeted them, a steady beat, wild and savage as the hearts of the drummers themselves.

"There's some infernal divilment on," Rafferty whispered; and Hallam, holding the rope that tied the native's wrists, nodded wordlessly.

They went slowly, for the paths were dark, and here and there they had to circle about some hidden trap. But the night was yet young when they saw the red glow of the clearing ahead, and the swaying ring of dancers. They halted, for between them and the light was the dark figure of a sentry.

He stood at the end of the path, where jungle gave place to open ground; he had his back to them, and watched the dancers. But the light found the barrel of the old Snider he held, and about his attitude there was a certain watchfulness, as if at any moment he might turn to peer along the path he guarded.

"Down!" Hallam breathed; and they sank to the ground in utter silence, shadows clothing them.

Hallam passed the rope into Manatee's hands.

"Here, mind him. If he stirs an inch, slip a knife into him. We can't have any shooting yet."

"Best be careful," Manatee said. But Hallam was gone.

He went like a snake, and with no more sound. He became one with the shadows, and after a moment even Manatee had lost him.

But to Hallam it seemed that the sentry was suspicious. He turned, peered back along the path, watched the dancers an instant, and turned again. Hallam lay still, the knife cold in his hand. He could with ease have shot the man; but that would have robbed them of the surprise upon which they counted in their attack.

Again the native watched the whirling ring of dancers in the fierce light of the fires. Their feet went *thud, thud, thud,* at this short distance louder even than the drums. *Thud, thud, thud.* . . Hallam was an inch nearer, close to the ground, fires. Their feet went *thud, thud, thud, thud* . . . The native leaned upon his rifle, unconscious of the fierce eyes measuring him from the gloom. The dancers whirled madly.

Something rustled, and the savage turned swiftly as a cat. In that instant Hallam leaped, and the sentry died without knowing even what it was that had made the sound he had heard.

Hallam, breathing lightly, crouched motionless above the huddled body, keen eyes searching the open space before him. He heard no outcry, saw no sudden gesture to show that the sentry's disappearance had been noticed. That was as well; for many men squatted before the beehive huts, and half of the dancers were men. If he and his comrades were to succeed at all, it must be by virtue of surprise—their first swift blow must shatter opposition, break completely any resistance that might be offered. Hallam had no illusions as to the weakness of his company. If the savages were allowed to band together, there would be little hope of a rescue.

Hallam, moving, crawled back to Manatee.

"I don't see any sign of the Parson," he whispered.

"Hope he ain't in a long oven," said Manatee grimly. "If he is, there's no hope for my gal."

"That's hardly likely. But we may as well attack when we find where she is. We'll separate into two gangs of five, and attack on this side of the village, moving across, so that there'll be no chance of firing into one another. I'll take one gang, locate the Parson and the girl, and start in a bit further along. When you hear the racket, chuck out a few sticks of powder and rush them with the guns. We'll have to scatter them at once, and keep them scattered, or we're done. Get me?"

"Aye," Manatee said, nodding.

Hallam slid away, four men at his heels. They came on another sentry, downed him swiftly while the cry bubbled in his throat.

They went a little further, cautiously, and saw Parson Dick and the girl seated with N'ga outside a hut, watching the dancers. The girl seemed weary; her chin was forward on her breast, and her slim figure drooped. But the Parson made no effort to hide his interest.

"A few more yards," Hallam whispered. "And mind the girl. Ready?"

"Aye."

Bending low, screening the flame with his body, Hallam struck a match, held it an instant to the stump of a cigar, drew in the smoke until the tobacco glowed an angry red. The others followed suit.

"Careful, now."

He drew a stick of dynamite from his pocket, touched the fuse to the end of the cigar, with a quick jerk of his arm flung it into a group of men squatting thirty yards away. It exploded deafeningly as they sprang erect, and they went down again in heaps, one screaming. . . .

Parson Dick was on his feet, guns up and spouting red. The man behind Hallam pitched forward and lay very still, the cigar burning his hair. Hallam noticed that as he ran forward.

DYNAMITE was booming at the other end of the village now, mingled with the faster rattle of revolver shots. Parson Dick had leaped behind the hut, dragging the girl with him. A group of savages, desperate as cornered rats, blocked Hallam's way. He dispersed them with a stick of dynamite, rounded the hut, gun up.

Before him was a short open space, then the dark jungle. Parson Dick and the girl had vanished utterly; but Hallam thought he heard a cry, even above the uproar all about him. It came from the direction of the bush.

*"Hallam!"*

Manatee, blood spattered and grim, gripped his arm.

"They're gone?"

Hallam pointed. "I'll follow. You stay here and put the fear of God into the niggers."

"Hell!" Manatee roared. "I'm comin' too! Rafferty can take charge."

But Hallam was gone. The jungle swallowed him.

He went forward swiftly through the darkness. Here the quiet was almost startling; the shots from the village, and even the occasional boom of giant powder, seemed distant and muffled.

He went straight forward, guided not by any reasoning, but by instinct alone. When a man is hunted, he runs straight. Hallam, the hunter, went straight.

Once, a man dropped on his shoulders from a tree above, and tried to hatchet him. The darkness saved him; but it did not help his attacker. Hallam went on, and the brown man stayed huddled there beneath the tree.

It was very quiet now; the uproar in the village seemed to have subsided. Hallam guessed the natives were scattered, their resistance overcome. Unless they were allowed to gather, they would give no more trouble. And Rafferty would take care to keep them on the move, to keep them harassed.

But where were Parson Dick and the girl? Hallam, halting, listened, and heard no sound in the jungle about. He stood in darkness and in utter silence; only the faint voice of the sea came to him, so steady as to be scarce noticeable. Parson Dick might be within ten feet of him, or he might be distant a mile. Hallam had no way of knowing. All he could do was obey the instinct that urged him on.

He went on slowly, hour after hour, until dawn broke to show him where he stood. He was in more open country now; a hill rose from the bush in front, and between him and it lay rolling grassland, broken here and there by a clump of trees. But of Parson Dick and the girl he saw no sign.

The taste of failure was bitter in his mouth. He had come to save the girl—had been within forty feet of her, and Parson Dick had carried her off before his eyes. That was a bitter pill to swallow. But he was too much a man to blame others for what had happened; his had been the fault, and his alone. He should have made sure that Parson Dick had no faintest chance of escape. He should have surrounded the village, giving his men orders to shoot the Parson like a mad dog. There were several vital things he should have done; and these he had neglected to do. He cursed himself for a fool.

A little breeze rose with the sun, set the grass blades waving. From the even green it lifted something white, played with it a moment, dropped it again. Hallam's eyes became intent. Again the scrap of white showed an instant, again the fitful breeze tired quickly of it.

Hallam ran forward, picked it up. It was a page from a small book, perhaps three inches by two. The page from a pocket Bible. Beyond the message of its presence here, it bore no message. But Hallam knew Parson Dick and the girl had passed this way.

He glanced about him, keen eyed, saw another leaf fluttering fifty yards ahead. That, he found, was the same as the first.

He ran on a little way towards the hill, and saw a third. Now, there could be no mistake about it; the girl had left these pages as a trail.

It was a broken trail, as Hallam quickly discovered. Often he came to gaps of a couple of hundred yards between the nearest leaves, and here he must circle patiently, swinging outward as he circled, until the next scrap of white came into view.

The trail led him across the grassland to the base of the little hill, then swung sharply to the right. Here Hallam lost it for half an hour or more, for the grass gave place to scrub. But he found it again, and followed it at a steady trot, though now his breath came in short, quick gasps.

"IF HE finds us," Parson Dick said, watching from far above, "he finds death." Lying there, he grinned, and thrust the long barreled revolver a little further forward, until its grim muzzle covered that distant hurrying figure.

The girl answered nothing. She sat far back in the cave, beyond reach of the creeping sunlight. Since landing on the island she had slept little, and the wild flight of the night had left her thoroughly exhausted. Once she had stumbled and fallen, and Parson Dick had lifted her and carried her a mile or more, a feat she would never have guessed to lie within his power.

Then it was that she had taken the little book from his pocket, and torn out the leaves, scattering them one by one, confident in the sheltering darkness. She knew Hallam would follow—that was the one thing of which she was certain.

"He seems to follow some trail," Parson Dick said now, and, turning, looked at her with some suspicion.

"I suppose we left footprints," said the girl a little wearily.

He grunted, and resumed his watching.

Hallam was at a loss. The trail led him here, and here it seemed to end; but he saw no sign of those he followed. He circled again, more widely still, but with a like result.

"He has lost the scent," Parson Dick said, chuckling. "That is as well for himself."

Behind him, the girl rose silently. If she could pass him, and run down the slope . . . She went forward a step, trembling. He did not stir, but lay there staring downwards, the gun between his hands. Another step. . . Still he seemed unaware that she had moved.

She leaped past him towards the open. With the speed of a striking snake he flung himself sideways, and caught her ankles, so that she must have fallen had it not been for the curtain of vine that hung halfway from the roof, to which she clung. She struggled, but he dragged her back, flung her roughly to the earthen floor.

"A sound, and I kill you!" he whispered.

She knew he meant what he said, and lay still. The excitement of the night had been too much for him; his brain had given completely beneath the strain. Any tenderness he might have felt for her was gone, vanished with his dreams.

Leaving her crouched there, he returned to the mouth of the cave.

She heard him muttering, and glanced up. He knelt on the very edge of the sunlight, peering out. She saw then that his gun had vanished. He had dropped it to catch her, and it had fallen into the open, and possibly some distance down the slope. The second of the pair he had lost in the village.

Watching him, she deemed him uncertain as to what to do. If he left the gun there, Hallam might see the sun strike on its polished brightness, and come to investigate. If, on the other hand, he ventured into the open to regain it, Hallam almost certainly could see him.

Parson Dick decided to get the gun. It lay a matter of six feet or so beyond his reach. He watched Hallam, awaiting a favorable opportunity. Now. . . He scrambled from the cave, retrieved the weapon, returned with it to shelter. It was in all the work of a few seconds.

But Hallam had seen. He came swiftly up the slope, one gun out, his fierce gray eyes on the oval of shadow where the cave lay. Parson Dick awaited him with a little grin.

Hallam was near now, so near that the white of his teeth showed evenly in the brown of his face. Parson Dick raised the revolver, squinted along the barrel. He was a good shot.

The girl was on his back, pulling at his wrist. He fired once; but the bullet went wide. He swore, and tried to throw her off. She clung to him with the strength of desperation. He struggled to his knees, trying to reach her, twisting himself in frantic efforts to dislodge her, to break her hold. And all the time she cried to Hallam, and Hallam answered once.

"Coming!"

His shadow darkened the cave as with a last great effort Parson Dick flung her off. She fell against the side of the cave, lay there, sick and dizzy, watching.

Parson Dick made an attempt to use his gun, and Hallam dashed it from his grasp. They closed, fell, rolled on the floor. Parson Dick bit and screamed in awful rage. Hallam struggled to his feet, caught him by the throat, lifted him. . . .

"Don't kill him!" the girl cried. Please!"

"As you wish," Hallam said, and flung he struggling man out from the cave and own the slope.

"I knew you'd come. . ." the girl said, obbing.

Parson Dick cried aloud to the blue ky.

"The Lord is angry with His servant. . ." He stumbled down the slope, the gun rooping forgotten in his hand.

"Poor Parson Dick. . . Poor Parson ick. . . ."

"Are you hurt?" Hallam said, lifting er to her feet.

She shook her head.

"No; only bruised. But I've been frightned, so frightened! I knew you'd come; ut you were so long. . . ."

"We came as fast as we could," Hallam aid awkwardly. "The wind was light. Maybe you'd better come out into the pen."

They went out into the sunshine, and at down. Far below them, Parson Dick tumbled along, eyes on the ground.

"I'm a fool," said the girl, dabbing at er eyes. "I thought I knew better than ther people, and all this trouble is my ault."

"Don't worry," Hallam said comfortngly. "There's no real harm done. And ou did some good."

She looked quickly up at him, a little opeful light in her eyes.

"I did?"

"You made me see there's something orth living for in life, besides gin."

She looked away again, across the sunlit grasslands.

"Don't you want to know what it is?" Hallam said.

"I think I know." She touched his hand, briefly.

"You're right. It's you. I'm going to work for you, and win you—even if it takes me years."

"I'll wait," she said gently. "And I know I won't have to wait long."

He came to his feet, too restless to sit there still. His eyes were eager, boyish.

"It's not so long . . . They won't have forgotten who I am. It's only a year since the luck changed, and now it's changed again. . . ."

She silenced him with a lifted hand. "Look."

A second figure had appeared upon the plain below, and now advanced rapidly towards Parson Dick. Parson Dick had stopped, straightened, seemed to know what awaited him. Manatee ran to within twenty feet of him, halted suddenly.

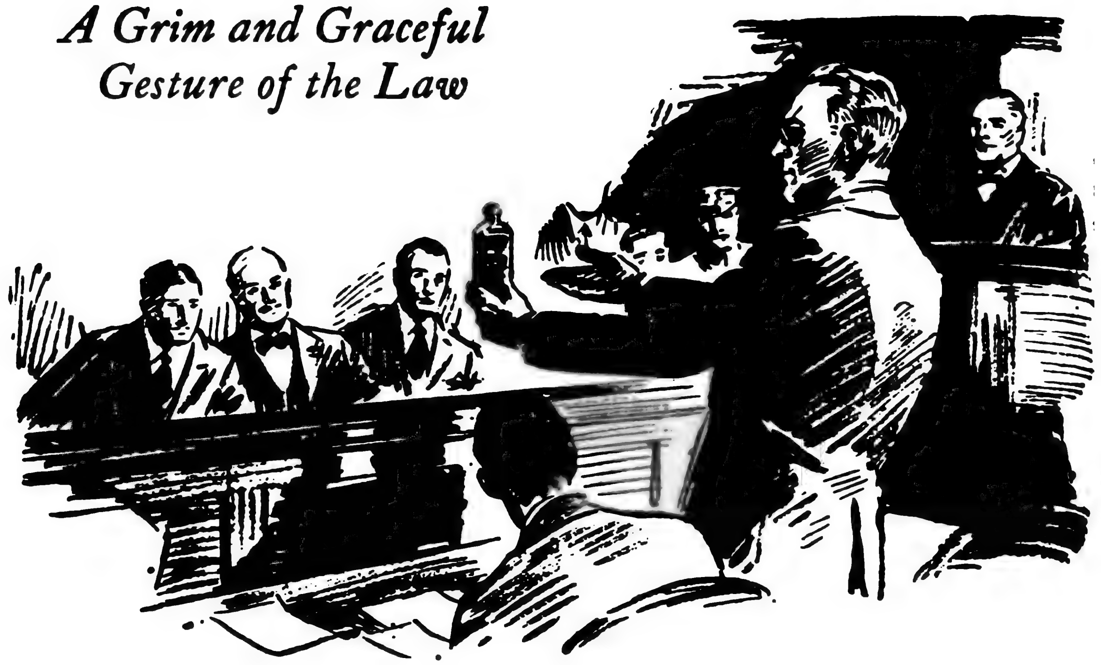
"You've a gun in your fist," he said. "*Use it!*"

Parson Dick raised his hand. The girl started to cry out in protest. But Manatee was yet beside himself. Manatee shot him dead.

"It's better that way," Hallam said gently to the sobbing girl. "It had to be . . . His dreams all ended that way."

He slipped an arm about her, led her down the slope. An insane dream had ended, but there was sanity again in the bright sunlight . . . And other dreams that were to come.

*A Grim and Graceful Gesture of the Law*



# PROOF *of the* PUDDING

### By CARL CLAUSEN

THE State released Doctor McNaughton, its last witness, and turned him over to the defense. As Silas Latham, the prosecutor, sat down, Colonel Enderly, the attorney for the accused, who had been seated, slumped back in the upholstered chair which the clerk of the court had supplied to accommodate his great bulk, stirred and blinked his heavy-lidded eyes as if the late afternoon light that fell through the dust-grimed window at his right, rather than the legal responsibilities that were his, had awakened him from his stupor of an hour and a half, during which time he had voiced neither objection nor challenge to the prosecutor's cross examination of the various witnesses.

Upon the table before the colonel stood Exhibit A, a small bottle containing some two dozen tiny pellets. Through the colored glass of the bottle they appeared to be of a dull amber shade. In reality they were pure white and contained each, according to the testimony of Doctor McNaughton, the witness just released, one twentieth of a grain of strychnine.

As Colonel Enderly's deep set eyes ca to rest upon this bottle, Silas Latham the prosecutor's, thin hand stole forwa with a movement that seemed almost i voluntary, and moved the bottle a lit to the left as if afraid that the mere lo of the colonel might change its conte to something less deadly than strychni At this move a faint challenging smi flitted across Enderly's massive put colored face.

Latham returned the smile with a shr of his bony shoulders. It was his fi murder trial. He had handled the e dence well. It had been purely circu stantial. Still, as his eyes swept the sma crowded courtroom, he felt very sure th he had secured a conviction. Neverth less, into his lean cheeks there stole barely perceptible flush as he dropped eyes under the colonel's veiled scruti and bent low over his notes.

If Enderly had noted the flush he ga no sign, and when Latham, after a sh whispered consultation with his assista a beardless youth, called the prisoner the stand, the colonel merely nodded iescence to his client. As the accused ose and walked to the witness box his es met those of the young assistant un- nchingly—too unflinchingly for a guilty n, the assistant thought with a momen- ry surge of pity.

The prisoner was a well built, neatly essed man of thirty-five or thereabout. is forehead was broad, his small pointed rs, shapely. His eyes were large and ry blue. The square, well formed chin noted character. He was anything but e conventional, rat faced murderer of tion. Still, there was something depress- g about him that was hard to define. It ight have been his complexion, which s an unhealthy white, bordering on sty, or that the small faunlike ears were ng a little too low, or merely perhaps cause the fact that being accused of urder he was calling on every last ounce fortitude to steel himself against the deal.

He held up his right hand and Latham id, shortly: "You've been sworn in once ready." At which the prisoner's hand opped to the railing of the box and re- ained there.

The prosecutor arose and pointed to the all amber colored bottle containing the rychnine tablets on the table in front of m, and said:

"Why did you buy the strychnine in s Angeles under an assumed name when u could have purchased it here in Car- al from a local druggist?"

Thomas Bell, the accused, glanced at s attorney, but Colonel Enderly was ex- nining the cuticle of his broad, flat gernails, apparently uninterested in the estion or in the answer it might elicit om his client.

"Because I happened to be in Los geles that day," the prisoner replied in clear steady voice.

"Ah—you *happened* to be in Los An- les, did you?" Latham repeated. "Per- ps you also *happened* to give the drug- st the first name that popped into your ad when you bought it?" he added with ithering sarcasm.

"No, sir," said Thomas Bell, simply, at hich Colonel Enderly left off contemplat- g his fingernails and leaned forward ghtly in his seat.

The prosecutor drew his breath in arply. He pointed an accusing finger at the open page of a small leather bound book such as pharmacists use for their drug records.

"You admit that you wrote this name—James Brown—by design when you bought the strychnine?"

"Yes, sir."

The prosecutor's teeth came together with a snap as if the ready admission annoyed him.

"Will you please tell the court why?" he asked in tones silky with portent.

"No, sir."

"You refuse to answer the question?" Latham flung back at him.

"Yes, sir."

At this last monosyllabic answer Colonel Enderly relaxed once more from his momentary show of tension and leaned back in his seat.

The prosecutor closed the book smartly and sat down.

"That'll be all," he said. He glanced about him with an ill-concealed look of triumph as the prisoner left the witness box and returned to his seat beside his attorney. "The prosecution rests," he announced.

THIS announcement seemed to stir Colonel Enderly momentarily from his apathy. As his gaze moved from the white face of his client to the small bottle on the table at the prosecutor's elbow, his loose mouth hitched itself in tight lines, and into his heavy lidded gray eyes there crept the battle light that had taught many an overzealous witness that the fire was a much safer place than the frying pan.

His glance wandered to the lean face of the prosecutor. He and Latham had been boys together. Both were born in Cardinal, and both had seen it grow from a hectic Western border town of half a hundred shacks to a city of over ten thousand inhabitants. The colonel's boyhood memories where Latham was concerned consisted chiefly of the vigorous pummelings he had administered to the tall, lanky New Englander who had bullied himself into the prosecuting attorneyship of Cardinal County at the age of forty-four.

The colonel knew that Latham was not an unscrupulous man; that he had a proper respect for his profession. But Enderly also knew that the prosecutor was not insensible to the favorable impression which prompt criminal convictions made upon his constituents. Enderly, eschewing politics with a fine Southern disdain—his ancestors were Louisianans—had hung out his shingle at the age of twenty-four. After a quarter of a century he had established a reputation that brought him three fourths of the important legal business, criminal and otherwise, of Cardinal County.

His characteristic Southern drawl was perhaps more responsible for the title of "colonel" than was his Spanish-American record—he had been a first lieutenant under Pershing in the Mindanao campaign. He was an attorney of the old school, a fighter, but a velvet gloved fighter. His blows hit the hardest when they fell the softest. Many a young bantam from the district attorney's office had gotten his spurs tangled up in the colonel's adroit verbiage and had lost them there.

Loyalty was Enderly's strong point. The man who retained him as counsel could rest assured that no stone would be unturned, that no bet would be overlooked, in his behalf. The colonel rarely lost a case. So rarely, indeed, that his enemies had more than once hinted—not openly, however—of perjured witnesses and the graver crime of jury fixing.

No one knew better than himself the falsity of these accusations. But he also knew that the old saying of "set a thief to catch a thief" might be invoked with a certain measure of success when prosecuting attorneys, in their anxiety to secure convictions, consider their own future political prospects rather than the culpability of the accused.

In the hush that followed Latham's announcement that he rested his case, the colonel leaned forward in his chair and appeared to be reviewing some notes scrawled in pencil on a sheet of paper.

THE prosecution had established that Thomas Bell, the prisoner, and his dead business partner, whom he was accused of having murdered, had quarreled a great deal during the past year. That Bell had urged a dissolution of the partnership repeatedly, and that he had tried to buy out his partner for twice the sum of what the deceased's half interest was worth. That on more than one occasion, and before several witnesses, he had stat that he intended to get rid of his partn during the year. Last but not least, th the two men had carried a partnersh life insurance policy for ten thousand d lars in each other's favor, and that t prisoner had presented his claim to t insurance company within forty-eight hou of his partner's death.

Bell had explained this seemingly u warranted hurry to profit by another's mi fortune by saying that their disagreeme and quarrels had plunged the conc heavily into debt, and that creditors we pressing them for payment. On its ow merits this explanation seemed consiste enough, but it took Latham less th three minutes by the clock to tear it tatters.

These were merely the salient poin There were other damaging facts whi coupled with the medical evidence th strychnine had been found in the de man's stomach, had made as complete case as any prosecutor could wish for his most sanguinary dreams.

Still, Enderly was convinced of l client's innocence. Thomas Bell and t dead man had occupied adjoining apa ments. Each had access to the othe rooms by pass keys. The dead man h gone into Bell's apartment and, feeling i disposed, had opened the medicine clo and had taken an overdose of what thought were cold tablets. The deceas had had a very severe cold for a mon and had in fact asked his partner for so aspirin tablets the very morning of l death.

These facts, Enderly knew, he wou never be able to prove. The only poi in his client's favor was that the bot of strychnine had been found in his Bell's—medicine closet, and that there h been no attempt on the part of his cli to do away with it. But in the face of t overwhelming circumstantial evidence, knew that this point would make little i pression upon the jury.

The judge, an elderly man with a fri of coarse gray hair about his templ signified his impatience at the colon delay by rustling a sheaf of papers at elbow. Enderly, noting this, nodded a tall, scholarly looking man with a V dyke beard, seated directly behind t prosecuting attorney.

"Doctor McNaughton, please take the stand, suh," he said. In action the colonel sometimes slipped into the lisping accents of his ancestors.

The physician arose and walked to the witness stand with an air of weary resignation. He was a busy man, subpenaed away from a large practice. This was his third day in court. While the clerk swore him in, Colonel Enderly arose.

Seated, he had been an impressive figure. Standing, he was doubly so. Although he was well over six feet in height, he did not give one the impression of being tall. He was heavy, but not immoderately fat. "Massive" was the correct term for his stature, as well as for his face. The head, surmounted by a mane of long, iron gray hair, was hung slightly forward on his great chest. His shoulders were not merely broad, but of an unusual depth as well. The ears were large and well formed, the nose inclined to bulbousness, but not excessively so. His forehead was broad and cathedral domed. His eyes, set deep under their prominently protecting brows, swept the small courtroom searchingly.

In spite of the somewhat slovenly and ungroomed appearance of the suit he wore, there was something heroic about the man.

A friend of his had once remarked facetiously that Colonel Enderly could show off a one hundred and twenty dollar suit to less advantage than any other man he knew of. This remark was not inapropos. Still, the colonel continued to buy one hundred and twenty dollar suits—and contrived to look heroic in them.

Bringing his gray eyes to bear upon Doctor McNaughton in the witness box, he said:

"Are you sure, Doctor, that the contents of this bottle are strychnine?"

"Yes."

"Positive?"

"Absolutely positive."

The colonel paused and consulted his notes.

"You testified a while ago that you had made a chemical analysis of these aforesaid contents?" he said.

"Yes. My laboratory assistant helped me," he qualified.

Enderly tilted the bottle and shook out one of the small white pellets.

"About how much strychnine—I mean in troy weight—does one of these pills contain?" he asked.

"One-twentieth of a grain," Doctor McNaughton replied, promptly.

"A lethal dose—I mean a dose large enough to cause the death of an adult human being—" this qualification for the benefit of the jury—"is about how large?" the colonel asked.

"It depends on the subject. One-sixth of a grain is usually considered within the bounds of safety."

"One-fourth of a grain would then be fatal?" the colonel prompted.

"Hardly. As I said, it depends upon the subject."

"I see. A lethal dose would be somewhere above one-fourth of a grain, then?"

"Ordinarily, yes, if no medical relief was resorted to."

The colonel pursed his lips. He seemed to be thinking.

"In other words," he went on, "half a grain would unquestionably be fatal to man or beast, if such medical relief was not forthcoming at once?"

Doctor McNaughton gave Enderly his best professionally superior smile.

"Under such conditions, half a grain would unquestionably kill a man," he replied, succinctly. "As to the beast part of it—one-twentieth of a grain would probably kill a dog."

"I see," said the colonel softly. Reaching out one heavy and hairy hand, he tilted the bottle once more and shook out several of the small white pellets upon the blotter. Latham sat hunched forward in his chair watching the colonel's every movement through narrowed lips. Something told the prosecutor that his opponent was about to pull one of his famous juggling acts. Latham's thin hands gripped the arms of his chair until the knuckles showed white. He was about to leap to his feet with an objection when the colonel picked up a pencil and with the point of it arranged the white pellets in a row on the green blotter.

"One — two — three — four—five—six —seven—eight—nine—ten," he counted, emphasizing each count with a movement of the pencil. He glanced about the courtroom as if to assure himself that everyone had heard. The twelve men in the jury box craned their necks. The judge wiped his spectacles with his handkerchief, then leaned forward and peered over the rims of them at the ten small white semispheres. "Ten one-twentieth grain tablets makes ten-twentieths or half a grain of strychnine," the colonel said. "Am I right, Doctor?"

"Undoubtedly," the physician replied indulgently, "a matter of simple addition."

"Quite so," the colonel drawled with a wink at Latham. The prosecutor raised his diminutive eyebrows with a movement of utter disdain. Unrebuffed, Enderly leaned back in his chair, folded his hairy, hamlike hands across his ample waistline and said in a clear tone, as if addressing everyone present rather than the witness:

"Suppose that someone in this room should take these ten pellets in one dose, he would be dead in a comparatively short time, would he not, Doctor?"

"If no medical relief was forthcoming, he most certainly would," the physician replied.

"The first symptoms of poisoning would appear—how soon?" the colonel asked.

"It varies. Usually in from three to fifteen minutes," said the witness. "Quite likely within one minute."

"Please describe to the court, briefly and in unprofessional terms, what such symptoms would be, Doctor," the colonel said.

The witness cleared his throat.

"A nervous twitching of the facial muscles and the limbs," he replied, "contraction of the muscles of the neck, followed by convulsions of increasing intensity and frequency."

"I see. The first of these symptoms would positively appear within five or ten minutes of the taking of as large a dose as half a grain?"

Latham arose.

"I object," he cut in. "No theory has been propounded as to the exact time in minutes which elapsed between the administering of the poison and the death of the victim."

"Objection overruled," said the court. "Witness, answer the question."

"The first symptoms of poisoning would certainly appear long before ten minutes had elapsed," Doctor McNaughton asserted.

"Thanks, Doctor, that'll be all," the colonel replied as the physican went back to his seat. Enderly, too, sat down.

"If it please, your Honor, the defense has no further testimony to offer, he said, calmly.

SILAS LATHAM, the prosecutor, tensed in his seat. He raised his right hand to his face as if to ward off a blow, then let it fall limply to his side and sat staring at the colonel. The judge cleared his throat and leaned forward, seemingly to listen for a reiteration of the defense's unheard of statement. It was the duty of the bench to see that a prisoner's interests were safeguarded. He wavered between ordering Enderly's summary retirement from the case and the personal friendship that existed between himself and the old warrior.

That the spectators realized that the prisoner's attorney was throwing up his hands without a fight was evident by the loud murmuring from all sides. They were all desert men and women who had come to see justice meted out, not conviction at the expense of the prisoner.

The bailiff pounded his gavel for order and the tension was broken by Colonel Enderly turning to the constable of the court, an old man standing with his back against the door as if to guard it against intrusion, and saying:

"Will you get me a glass of water, Ed?"

"Yes, Colonel, certainly, sir," the man replied. While he shuffled off on his errand, Enderly pushed the green blotter with the ten white tablets to the exact center of the table and inclined his head deferentially at the court.

"Your Honor will pardon the digression?" he said.

The judge nodded, vaguely. He was nonplused and showed it.

The constable brought the glass of water and placed it on the table between the colonel and his client. Enderly arose and faced the jury

"My closing argument will be brief, gentlemen," he said. "You've heard the testimony of Doctor McNaughton." He paused and pointed to the ten small pellets still lying upon the green blotter. "According to his statement and backed up by his laboratory analysis, these ten pills, if taken in one dose, contain enough strychnine to kill anyone of us. My learned opponent—" here he bowed to the prosecutor—"bases his hopes of conviction on this premise."

Latham was on his feet in a moment.

"It is not a premise—it's a fact!" he stormed. "I've proved them to be strychnine."

"Just so," Colonel Enderly observed mildly. He picked up the green blotter, poured the ten pellets into his left palm and held them out in plain sight of judge and jury as a conjuror will when he is about to perform some feat of legerdemain. Then he turned to his client and said:

"Mister Bell, stand up, please."

The accused arose.

"Open your mouth and tilt back your head."

The prisoner complied.

Before the eyes of everyone the colonel dropped the pellets one by one into the accused's mouth, then made him face his judge and jury with the ten deadly little tablets in plain view on his tongue. Then Enderly handed him the glass of water and bade him swallow them. The prisoner did so, handed the glass back to the colonel and sat down.

As Enderly replaced the empty tumbler upon the table, a wave of horror passed through the crowd. Twelve blank faces stared at the prisoner from the jury box. The judge reached for his handkerchief and wiped the perspiration from his forehead, although the day was not excessively hot. Doctor McNaughton sat pulling his Vandyke frantically. For the first time in the proceedings his boredom had vanished. Ed, the constable, shifted from one foot to the other, grasping the doorknob as if ready to bolt for an ambulance. The prosecuting attorney rose halfway in his chair. Suspecting a trick, yet horror-stricken, he stared from his ancient enemy to the accused with a mixture of fear and incredulity.

The colonel, noting the expression of his face, beckoned to Doctor McNaughton. The physician arose in a half dazed fashion and came to his side.

"Please examine my client's mouth, Doctor," the colonel said, briefly.

With trembling fingers, the physician did so. When he was through, the colonel said:

"Will you tell the court what you find, Doctor?"

The physician nodded. He turned halfway round and faced the court, steadying himself, weakly, by the table with his right hand.

"He has undoubtedly swallowed the strychnine, your Honor," he stuttered hoarsely.

The judge sighed audibly. He glanced beseechingly at his clerk, the clerk at the jury, and the twelve men in turn at the prosecutor whose face, the color of chalk, was working as if under the strain of some hidden, sinister emotion.

"I charge conspiracy to defeat justice," Latham finally found words to blurt out. "To cheat the gallows."

Instead of answering, Colonel Enderly pulled his watch from his pocket, laid it on the table in front of him, lit a cigar, and leaned back in his chair. His right hand moved out and came to rest upon his client's shoulder.

What happened during the next fifteen minutes is history in the legal annals of Cardinal County. Doctor McNaughton staggered to the telephone and called up his private hospital instructing them to get the operating room in readiness. Ed, the constable, loped across the street to the police station for the ambulance. The prosecuting attorney sat white and shaken in his chair, staring at his opponent who was smoking a black Manila stogie nonchalantly, and at the man beside him whose pale face was turned to the window. The jury were whispering among themselves in suppressed and excited tones, and the spectators were milling in their seats. The judge pounded the ineffectual gavel for order, calling in querulous tones for Ed to clear the court. But Ed was in the police station cranking the asthmatic engine of the ancient ambulance.

Presently the colonel and his client arose. Enderly's right hand was still on the accused's shoulder. The only sign of nervousness on the part of the prisoner was a certain pardonable show of impatience to have it over with. His pale face showed no indication that convulsions were imminent except perhaps those of mirth.

Picking up the watch with his left hand, Colonel Enderly turned his face to the court.

"Exactly twenty minutes have passed," he said. Then he replaced the watch in his pocket. "The defense concludes its argument. Will the Court please instruct the jury?"

The judge glanced at the prosecuting

attorney as if for affirmation. Silas Latham merely nodded his acquiescence as he gathered up his papers with trembling hands.

The jury's absence from the courtroom was as brief as were his honor's instructions. In less than five minutes the twelve men were back in their seats. The judge formulated the stereotyped question to their foreman in a thin, quavering voice:

"Are you agreed upon your verdict, gentlemen?"

"We are."

"Do you find the defendant guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty."

AN HOUR or so later when Colonel Enderly was seated in a rear booth at the Cardinal Café and Oyster House, with a huge platter of calf's liver and bacon, his favorite dish, before him, Silas Latham came over to his table. The prosecutor held out his hand.

"When I think how near I came to convicting an innocent man, my hair stands on end," he said. "But how the dickens did you know that the stuff wasn't strychnine?"

"Oh, wasn't it strychnine?" the colonel asked in well simulated astonishment.

Latham gave him a sickly smile.

"Don't rub it in," he said. "What I'll do to Doctor McNaughton and his laboratory assistant will be plenty," he added.

The colonel helped himself to Worcestershire sauce.

"Wouldn't be too hard on 'em, Si," he said. "Doc McNaughton's a good egg and besides he might turn the tables on you by proving that it was strychnine. Then you'd be up against libel."

"What d'you mean—prove it?"

"Well," the colonel drawled, "you can prove almost anything if you set out to, except innocence. I knew Tommy Bell was no murderer, so I simply concentrated on the weapon and busted its cutting edge, so to speak. When I saw how determined you were to hang an innocent man because he couldn't prove that he didn't do murder, I went and did a little medical research work on the Q. T. You see, Si, Tommy has been taking strychnine on account of his heart for five years, so to begin with he could stand a lot more'n you and I can. Immunity by toleration, I think they call it. Anyway, I prescribed that he increase his doses a mite each day until he could stand half a grain, and I took the stuff to the prisoner myself as his attorney.

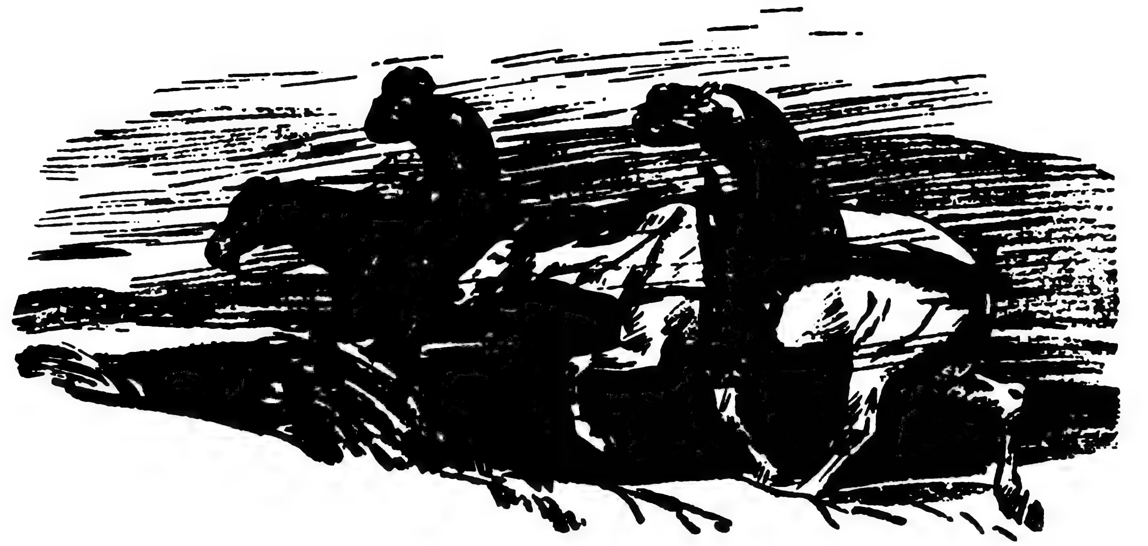
"The reason he bought the stuff in Los Angeles under an assumed name was because he was sensitive and didn't want folks around here to know of his ailment. It would have hurt him with the wholesalers—a man with heart trouble is a poor credit risk—and his credit was none too good already on account of that termagant of a partner of his who went and took Tommy's strychnine by mistake for cold tablets."

Latham's face was working, but Colonel Enderly silenced the threatened outburst with a wave of his pudgy hand.

"Keep your shirt on, Si," he said. "You can't put a man in jeopardy twice for the same murder, so save your breath. It would have listened good to you an' the jury, I don't think, if he had told the truth about why he bought the pills in Los Angeles under an assumed name, so I told him to keep his trap shut and you hopped right into it with both feet when you had him on the stand the last time like I'd figgered you would."

"I'll—I'll get you for this!" Latham spluttered.

"What on?" the colonel drawled, blandly. "Fur practicin' medicine without a license?"



# The Humdinger Detective

## A Western Yarn of Mystery and Fast Action

### By HOWARD R. MARSH

BARNUM'S dead, ain't he? Well, that's kind of hard luck for him, 'cause he's missing a cinch bet. Freaks, I mean. He could outfit six sideshows complete and three menageries, right here at the Terrapin Rancho. He wouldn't have to pick and choose either—just take the run of the herd. The dudes that crop out of this wrangling ranch every year would be worth twice the price of admission.

Every freak from A to Ikey Izzard lands at the Terrapin. It's got to be the ultra-violet place for famous fanatics to fan themselves, out on the hot wild desert. We ain't never missed one notorious bozo that I ever heard of except that Mexican that wouldn't run for president of Mexico. At that, he probably started for here but got stuck in some crossroads bughouse along the way.

Here's what come to dude us in one week: A French prima donna from Three Rivers, Michigan; Señor Irono, the Italian strong man, whose father, Pat Moran, was an honest saloon keeper on the old Barbary Coast, 'Frisco; a lip stick heel-and-toe artist known to the audience as Gloria Van Stynham but whose mail came addressed from her family and *close* friends—postage due—to Mrs. Rebecca Abberstein. And we was already suffering on the ranch from an Allah-'Merican mudguard from Princeton and a drawback from the same place; the Scandinavia Six-Day Bicycle team; a female historian; a d.t. case; and a cornetest-before-the-crowned-heads-of-Europe, if any. Yep, and there was a ham actor we called the Duke that had got mixed up with heroin and heroine and was trying to cure himself of both habits.

Can you imagine the wear and tear on me, the foreman? Ain't it hell? Honest, ain't it? Twenty-two dudes, male and female, eight cowboys and nine hundred cattle for me to chaperon. The cattle weren't much trouble.

The assorted dudes called me "Big Buck," "Majordomo," "Captain," and "Oh-you're-so-big-and-fat-and-grand," and I called them—well, we won't mention it.

They ruined the forty thousand acres of rock and sand that we call home—our dear little Terrapin Rancho—that's what they did. Just ruined it. A prima donna singing through her nose, the Scandinavia bike team pedaling, Gloria Rebecca Van Stynham Abberstein practicing the lip stick, the actor misbehaving and the football players kicking. So was everyone else, as far as that goes.

But worse was coming. Oh, yes, much worse.

IT WAS a bad morning, anyway. You see, we had a five mile runner on the Terrapin from some cow college. All the time he was trying to get someone to pace him. Well, we had just one pacer in the outfit. That was the little calico pony belonging to Red Pelham. So Red agreed to pace this underwear advertisement for five miles.

Off they started, one end of the rawhide lariat 'round the collegiate's waist and the other end fastened to the pommel of Red's Western saddle. Red had a watch in one hand and a cigaret in the other.

He paced that half naked boy for five miles all right, but at the end of five miles Red was all interested in his watch. At the end of six miles the boy was trying to get enough breath together to let out a yell. At the end of seven miles he was leaning back against the rope, but that didn't do him no good 'cause Red's pony is used to pulling wild steers. At the end of eight miles the boy showed what bad shape he was in by falling on his face.

Being drug a hundred yards through sand and cholla cactus ain't a treat to any man. Nope. But this poor bozo didn't have enough breath left to yell, and Red Pelham, hoping for the best, didn't seem to notice that he was dragging a human anchor.

Well, when we got that sandpapered collegiate back to the bunkhouse he admitted he was dying. Dying real audible he was, too, and we sat around and listened. By and by he got enough strength to rise up and complain to Tom Keith, owner of the Terrapin. He mentioned the brutal treatment and then threatened to sue poor old Tom, who ain't got five hundred simoleons to his name or else he wouldn't be entertaining dudes on his ranch—threatened to sue him for fifty thousand dollars, more or less.

Five minutes later I was paged by Tom Keith. Two minutes after that I was in the 'dobe office, trying to apologize for Red Pelham's thoughtlessness and explaining how accidental-like it all was.

Well, this female historian that we had visiting us at the time suddenly screamed for Boss Keith. She had found a stone that looked like a rock and she was hoping it was a rock that the Indians had used for a stone. Being a historian, nothing less'n a century makes much difference to that sixty year old girl, so I knew she'd keep Boss Keith with her for a long time, trying to get the history of that rock that looked like a stone. I ain't curious ordinarily but I took the chance to look around the boss's 'dobe office to see if I could learn anything.

First thing I saw was a letter on his desk. I didn't want to read it, especially as it was upside down and kind of hard to make out some of the words. The letter said something like this:

*Dear Mr. Keith:*

*Many prominent people have told me of your dude wrangling ranch and urged me to visit you. I am rather tired out with a series of difficult cases. If you have room for me I'll visit you for a few weeks at once.*

*Sincerely,*
*Hershall H. Hall*

Hershall H. Hall!

Hot diggity dog! Say, man, I began to get nervous and scared right away. That fellow is the biggest, smartest, greatest detective in the world. I never pick up a copy of our weekly *Liar* but I see something about Hershall H. Hall and what he's doing. If the Government loses a dreadnought or Mrs. Guggenheim a diamond necklace, Hershall H. Hall finds it for them. He sure is the huckleberries in this detective business.

Thinking about him, my past life reeled before my eyes. I thought of that bloody left ear I shot offen a slicker down in Tombstone, Arizona, eight years ago, and that crooked poker game we tried on the dudes last fall. Then those cute little yearlings that I was nursing over in Jaw Bone Cañon, bringing them up proper for my private branding iron . . . They didn't make me feel comfortable, either. Of course, I was doing it for their own good, but some of the neighboring ranch owners might not have understood my humane instincts.

That room got hotter and hotter as bloody ears, five aces and a bunch of yearlings danced before my eyes, and finally I had to beat it out to get some air.

"Boys!" I hollered to the outfit which had gathered in the bunkhouse and were lying as big as usual and puffing out dividends for Mr. Bull Durham. "Boys, get right with God!" Then I told them about Hershall H. Hall coming to see us.

I guess the boys all got some nervous, 'cause right away things began to happen My precious rawhide lariat which I had plaited myself suddenly came back after two months' absence; some Spanish spurs, real silver, which was Red Pelham's prize and only possession was found under his bunk where they had disappeared last year. A half dozen gold nuggets that Steve MacReady found in a pocket below Juniper Mesa, and which had been swiped from him, also popped into view again. They was in different shape, though—strung together to make a girl's necklace. I always blamed Mex Pete for that. He ain't never had a girl but he's only sixty-two and he's still hoping. I thought I could see where his two teeth had been biting that gold into shape, too.

Finally we all went out and dug up Walt Dow's homemade apricot brandy. It had only been buried two months instead of nine months and thirteen days, or the nearest full moon, like it should have been. But we didn't dare to leave it in the ground no longer with that great detective, Hershall H. Hall, coming.

After surrounding my share I went back to Boss Keith's office.

"Boss," I said at him real bravelike, "some of the boys say that we're going to have a visit from a great detective—Hershall H. Hall."

"What's the matter, Buck?" the boss asked. "Try that word 'Hershall' once more. It was kind of blurred 'round the edges."

"Hershall Apricot Brandy H. Hall," I repeated. "Is he coming?"

The boss didn't answer. He didn't need to. I could see what was what, so I jerked a two bit piece out of my chaps and planked it down on the desk.

"Boss," I confessed, real humble, "I've been holding out on you. Thursday, when I went to Cactus Siding to get that salt for the cattle, I overcharged you. I sneaked two bits and bought me a pound of gum drops. Mostly liquorice."

"Oh," Boss Keith said, hurtlike. "Buck, I wouldn't of thought it of you. Cheating your employer! And mostly liquorice, too! Got any left?"

"None of the liquorice kind," I mourned. But I was feeling better after confessing. "When's this great detective coming to the Terrapin?"

"Coming?" asked the boss. "He's been here four days now."

COURSE we didn't know him. You wouldn't of, either. Tall and thin with glittering black eyes and fingers like chalk pencils. That's what every great detective looks like, ain't it? Black hair with white patches over the ears, silent as a mummy and quick as a wildcat. Well, you're all wet. Short and stocky with red hair and blue eyes which are always kind except when they ain't and then, man, they *ain't*. That's Hershall H. Hall. Sometimes his eyes would go right through a guy's skull and rivet up the other side, but generally he was smiling real easylike. He was a regular guy, that's what.

For four days that fellow had been sitting in the sun out by the corral. He had a broken chair that had wires in it instead of spindles but I guess it was a comfortable chair 'cause he had sat there all that time. The boys didn't feel no better about it 'cause he'd been watching them so long, either. But by and by they got nerve enough to go up and talk to him, figuring they better act friendly.

"Mr. Hall," said Steve MacReady, "two months ago I lost an imitation pair of gold cuff links. Could you tell me where to find them?"

"I lost an engagement ring with an almost diamond in it," Mex Pete added. "Could you tell me where it is? And a locket for a girl's picture and——"

Hershall H. Hall looked at the boys and grinned. He had a humdinger of a grin.

"Sure," he said, "I can tell you where they are. Just rip up the planks under the bunkhouse and you'll find them all."

The boys looked at him kind of funny, then Mex Pete, being the thinnest, crawled under the bunkhouse. Yep, he found all those trinkets and more, too, just like Hershall H. Hall had said. You see a pack rat had been carrying them away and putting them in his nest just like pack rats always do, but we didn't have enough sense to know it. Hershall H. Hall, sitting there by the corral, had been watching the rat commit burglary.

The next piece of detective work—pretty good I call it—was about a horse. Red Pelham went up to him and said real brave:

"Can you tell me where my horse is that was stolen ten days ago?"

"What kind of a horse was it?" Hershall H. Hall asked, softlike.

"I—I—" stuttered Red Pelham.

"That horse," Hall said, "went back home. South of here. That's where you'll find him, if you have enough nerve to go there."

After Red Pelham slouched way, talking to himself and red in the face, Hershall H. Hall turned to me and grinned.

"That was easy, wasn't it? If a man don't know what kind of a horse he owns he's neither bought it nor bred it. Therefore he must have lifted it. He couldn't have lifted it over the mountains to the north, could he now?" He grinned again. "So the horse naturally had to come from the south."

Then came big Walt Dow, the blond walrus.

"Detective Hall," he reported, solemn as a gopher—which is some solemn, "a month ago I was playing my pet musical instrument, happy as a lark. Today my music is gone forever, and——"

"Your mouth organ will be returned just as soon as you promise not to play it in the bunkhouse," Hershall H. Hall said. "Just go round promising."

When Walt had started, I couldn't keep quiet no longer. I had buried Walt's harmonica in the sand myself, being tortured into it.

"How," I asked Hershall H. Hall, "how in blistering blazes did you know it was a mouth organ and who took it?"

"Did you," asked the detective, "ever see a fellow that weighed two hundred pounds, had sentimental blue eyes, a big mouth and yellow spreadeagle mustaches, who didn't play a harmonica? Particularly the mustaches. No! Besides, he had a piece of the imitation chamois of the bag it came in patching his real chamois vest; you could even see where the puckering string was. Also, Mr. Keith told me that Walt Dow made apricot brandy and played a mouth organ."

After those pieces of detective work I got my boys together pronto.

"Worthless ones," I made the speech, "do you realize we're entertaining the greatest detective in the world on this here rancho? We've had prima donnas and bartenders, mudguards and chess players, but we ain't never had a detective before. Now what do all these people come here for? To rest and practice mostly, eh? Well, Hershall H. Hall has rested a lot but he ain't had no practice to speak of. Just simple things. Now we just got to give him something serious to practice with or else he might be finding out something which wouldn't do none of us no good. Get me? So start thinking, if possible. A big mystery! Something good and deep and hard."

The boys thought with all their might. You could hear them. Finally Whistling Slim Carter came through.

"Kidnapping," he said. "Let's kidnap someone!"

"Great! Hot diggity dog!" I hollered. I knew the very person he wanted to kidnap and I knew why he wanted to kidnap her. "Kidnapping, it is. Let's start!"

THERE'S one thing certain. Whistling Slim Carter sure can whistle. In the first place he's built like a whistle—tall and thin with a big mouth. He's one devil of a fine kid, bless his leaky heart. He came to the Terrapin Rancho three years ago, right out of his second year in college—lanky and awkward and sick. He had a pair of porous plaster lungs and a heart that some co-girl had cracked up a bit, but he was whistling to beat all hell.

Well, his heart got better pretty fast and even his internal bellows got a new coat on them. But he liked the Terrapin and we liked him, and he stayed on. Course, his money ran out, so Boss Keith gave him a job as a *vaquero*. He was a pretty good one, too; a hard rider, square shooter and full of deviltry. Then he got his heart tangled up again. It was little Tomasita Galbraith over at the Bar O

Ranch this time, and he wasn't good for nothing after that.

But whistle! Say, he's a nightingale and mocking bird and steam calliope and cornetest all mixed up in one. When he tightens up his thin face and begins to blow, man, you could weep at his happy music it's so pretty, and laugh at his sad songs, they're so trilly. A great kid, I tell you.

"Let's kidnap Tomasita Galbraith," he said.

Of course he'd say that. Tomasita was on his mind. He was lost in a mesquite thicket of love and couldn't find his way out. You see, Tomasita's father, old Bill Galbraith, owns just two or three hundred square miles of Red Creek Valley, the richest sand patch around here. And he wasn't going to have no daughter of his marry a long, thin, black eyed cowboy whose only claim to glory was that he could give a lark ten rods start when it came to whistling.

With Tomasita it was different. While I'm on this love stuff I better tell about her, too. She's just a million, that girl. The combination of shiny yellow hair and big brown eyes always did get me, anyway, particularly when the eyes can talk and underneath them is a little upturned nose and a dimple and a mouth just twitching to laugh. Tomasita isn't no bigger'n thirty seconds, but what there is of her is gold nugget. When she joins the boys at a rodeo, there ain't a one of them but wishes he was the last steer which she roped and threw. Yep, every blamed cowboy would like to wear her brand mark and I guess some of them do at that—right on their hearts. Surer'n shooting, Whistling Slim Carter belonged to her. And she liked him, too, in spite of papa's ideas to the contrary.

No wonder then that Whistling Slim shouted:

"Let's kidnap Tomasita, and that'll give the detective something to detect!"

Well, I saw Whistling Slim's plan quick enough. It was a double-jointed plan. He'd get the girl away from her father; he'd have some of her company, and—well, Slim had a mighty persuasive way of talking when he mentioned elopements. Yep, under cover of giving Hershall H. Hall something to do that whistling kid would lasso his girl. I saw the whole thing quick enough, but I'm a big fool sometimes and soft hearted as a chicken about Whistling Slim. Just the same I haven't no excuse for saying:

"Kidnapping it is! Hot diggity dog! Away we go!"

We went. The other boys would do anything for a little excitement, and what was a little kidnapping between friends? In three hours we had captured little Tomasita and put her all nice and comfortable in a cute little shack up in Bleached Cañon that some sheep herder, damn his hide, had built. There she was with plenty of food, her horse browsing in the encelia, and not knowing whether to be happy or mad 'cause we kept her there. Mostly she was happy, though; at least as long as Whistling Slim was with her.

After a while, though, we yanked Whistling Slim away and left old Mex Pete as bell wether to that girl. Back to the Terrapin we pounded, full of chuckles and excitement and trying to figure what old Bill Galbraith would look like when he rode up to report the loss of his darling daughter and what Hershall H. Hall would do.

Bill Galbraith came all right. It was after dark and we was all imitating campfire girls for the benefit of the dudes. Walt Dow had his mouth organ back and music was just dripping off the ends of his mustache. I was Ananiasing about Wild West heroes and fighting the Indians and rustlers and all that magazine stuff, and the tenderfeet was just lapping up the thrills. Then out of the dark into the campfire smoke galloped old Bill Galbraith. He was wheezing like a leaky accordion and he wasn't happy. His face was white and his hands were shaking.

"Boys!" he yelled, real scared. "She's gone! Tomasita's gone! Is—is Whistling Slim here?"

Yep, Whistling Slim was there. He had made it a point to be there and he uncoiled his six feet four and stared Papa Galbraith in the eye.

"Sir," he said patting his gun, "are you insulting me?"

"No, no," papa said, "but we got to find Tomasita. Come on, boys," he begged. "Rouse out and look for her. She's gone! Went out riding before noon and ain't back yet."

"Gone?" sang my boys in chorus, led by

Whistling Slim. "Gone! Ain't that terrible!"

That was the signal for me to rise on my hind legs.

"It ain't necessary to look for Tomasita," I promised old Bill Galbraith. "We don't have to look for her a-tall. We have with us here tonight, gentlemen—" I tried to find an opening in my shirt to stick my hand into— "We have here the ace high, big casino detective of the world. I'll now sit down and he'll tell us where Tomasita Galbraith is. Gentlemen, if any, and ladies, I introduce Hershall H. Hall."

Hershall H. Hall rose up and threw a bomb.

"Boys," he said real quiet, and his eyes were full of savvy, "boys, if Tomasita ain't under cover safe and sound I'd go get her and bring her back. Honest, I would. I'm not a weather prophet but from what Boss Keith tells me we're in for the worst norther of the year. So if Tomasita ain't safe——"

His words trailed off and he sat down again, leaving my dumb gang of cowboys staring at each other with their mouths dropping open.

A norther! Hot diggity dog! I'll say we was facing a norther! If we hadn't been so full of plans and excitement we'd of known for hours that hell was brewing, instead of letting it sneak up on us. Now it was ripe and ready to hit. The air for one breath was so quiet that it 'most hurt. Then there was a funny kind of sucking, like if a big fish had his mouth open and was trying to swallow us all. After that for a minute or two there wasn't nothing except a roar, a long ways off like 'steen thousand cattle stampeding. Finally the first puff of wind came, scattering our campfire and throwing sand into our eyes and open mouths.

WELL, me and my gang knew that Tomasita was safe in the cabin up Bleached Cañon, but old Bill Galbraith didn't know it and he was bellowing at us to do something. The tenderfeet around that campfire had all got excited, too, and were shouting fool questions back and forth and doing an Apache dance in the smoke and flying sand. Already those bozos were making great plans for the rescue of poor little Tomasita who knew better how to take care of herself than the whole twenty-two dudes put together.

The Scandinavia Six-Day Bicycle team ran to get their bikes. They'd search the desert, they would, on their chariots for the whole six days. The prima donna began to sing in high C, "Tomasita! Tomasita!" and I couldn't think of nothing except a coyote. A full twenty-two and a half feet into the darkness she went, calling that way! "Oh-hoo, Tomasita!" Next rose up the sandpapered collegiate five-miler and began to stretch his legs. Ready to run a race with Death, he was. Iron, the strong man, doubled up his arms and shook his fists real fierce at the storm. The female historian was taking notes on the event and the ham actor began to make a speech of encouragement. The way he held one arm in front of his face it was easy to see he was used to warding off worse things than sand and flying embers. The other clerks and athletes and fanatics were buzzing 'round like bees looking for their queen.

Papa Galbraith thought he had su-popped into an insane asylum and to quiet him down my boys promised to get their horses from the corral and start looking. They figured they'd prance 'round the ranch-house a few times and then come back to their bunks and sleep, leaving the Scandanavia Six-Day Bikers, the sandpapered collegiate and the prima donna to continue the search. Boss Keith took hold of Papa Galbraith's arm and led him to the ranch-house for one of these long, restful, consoling drinks, so we figured everything was jake. Of course we might lose some of those dudes of ours under the drifting sand, but that didn't seem to cause no worry.

Moving away from the campfire I caught sight of Whistling Slim Carter. He was pretending he didn't have no place to go but he was going there damn fast. Me, I took after him and caught him in the corral where he was whistling for his horse. Say, that kid was like an outlaw pony—tight and nervous and jumpy.

"What's eating you, Slim?" I asked him, grabbing hold of his arm.

He caught my arm, scared-like.

"Buck," he hollered above the wind, "Buck, she's out in this!"

"Who, you fool?" I yelled. "Not Tomasita! She's up in the cabin——"

"Nope," Whistling Slim answered. "She's out on the desert. She was going to gi ex Pete the slip and I was to meet her ar that rock called Granite Butte at idnight. That's fifteen miles from here d——"

"My God!" I said, real prayer-like. We as both dumb for a minute, thinking it rer and too scared to talk. Then I blurted Slim:

"Man, do you know what that means?" hollered, and the wind yanked the words it of my mouth. "That girl out in this ell? And it'll probably get worse every inute."

Whistling Slim nodded and gulped. He uldn't say nothing.

"You was going to meet her, eh?" I ibbered. "Well, you'll never meet her ow. She'll get to Heaven and you're ound for hell."

"Mebbe," Slim said. He whistled again r his pinto. "You coming there with me?"

"Sure," I said. "Where's my horse?"

I knew at the time I was brave, but I idn't know till afterwards how much of Carnegie hero I really was. Nor how uch of a fool, either. Me, a desert man, tarting off that way without no canteen of ater and not telling anybody where I was oing! That sure takes the first prize for umbness.

Slim and I was due for a ride right into he center of hell that night. Mebbe we'd nd a little yellow haired girl there. Mebbe ot. It was a bum bet, though, and we new it.

NORTHER! Say, that storm that blew Slim and me along to the south was the worst damn cyclone e've had in twelve years. Two hundred iles down the Mojave Desert it came nd before it got through it changed the ndscape complete. It built up new sand ountains, filled up cañons, buried creosote nd cattle, waterholes and roads without o sense at all. The air was just one mass f fine sand, riding hellity larrup on a inety-mile gale. Twenty-two million ed-hot needles stuck through your skin if ou turned your head around; your eyes ere closed and your mouth filled with grit n half a second. It was just like a big mery wheel, only worse. Nature's own rindstone.

The only thing that kept us alive was at the wind was behind us, lifting us along e just rode the back of that norther, and all the time I kept thinking of little Tomasita in that flying Hades ahead. She'd have to face it coming from Bleached Cañon, and, God help her, she couldn't face that wind, and no one else couldn't, neither!

The sand got so thick you couldn't tell what was ground and what was air. Creosote bushes went flat from that wind and stayed down, buried under the waves of sand. A couple of times our horses tripped and Slim and I went flat, too, and nearly didn't get up again.

We was 'most blind from the flying red-hot needles and our game little pintos was blind, too. But that didn't make no difference; eyes weren't no good out in that roaring, tearing, rasping bombardment of sand and wind. Our hides were half ripped offen us and our clothes, too. If Slim got twenty feet away I'd lose him, and as for talking—say, words was as useless as a roomful of smoke.

The only thing that kept us going was thought of Tomasita, and that kept us going fast. We pounded along and kind of trusted to luck we was aimed right. The wind screeched and yelled and laughed real joyful in our ears, the sand skinned us alive and the creosote and mesquite kept tripping the ponies. Twice we crashed into boulders and once bumped hard into each other.

How we got as far as we did, I don't know and won't ever know. For twelve miles our luck held, but it had to end, and it did—pretty bad. One second we was racing along and the next we was going end over end through space. Yep, end over end. We had ridden right over the side of a barranca, that's what, and it seemed to me we dropped ten miles before the ground hit us. After we smashed bottom there wasn't no noise for a minute or two down in that rocky barranca except for the howling wind and sand and my horse, Fried Egg, who was neighing something terrible. Every bone in my body was busted and every liver and light and gizzard knocked out of place. At last I rolled over and crawled along.

"Whistling Slim!" I yelled. "Whistling Slim!"

I thought I heard something in the blackness and then I found the kid under his horse. I put my head down close to his and he yelled into my ear:

"Roll this damn old brute offen me!"

I twisted and pried and lifted that dead horse, and finally Whistling Slim rolled free. I took his arm and he got to his feet, staggering fierce.

"We got to go on," he said. "We got to go on."

"Nope," I yelled. "We stay right here. It won't do no good to get to Granite Butte. Tomasita couldn't have made it. Besides, poor Fried Egg's got a broken leg and your horse broke its neck, by the way it's acting."

"Tomasita might be there," Slim hollered. "She might've started early. Come on!" And he started off very sudden across the barranca.

That boy wasn't walking; he was kind of hopping along and dragging on one side. I could feel that. He was hurt real bad when his horse fell on him but he kept going. Up out of the barranca he crawled, me pushing him, and into that sandblasted hell again.

Don't ask me how we made the next three miles. I don't know. There ain't no words to tell about it. We leaned back against the wind; we was lifted; we was pushed. We ran sometimes and we'd go down in a heap when some bush or rock tripped us; then we had to get up pronto or we'd be buried alive. Once or twice Slim groaned, but his groan wasn't nothing compared to the wind. Every time he fell he managed to push to his feet again. Yep, I was sure he'd have to stay down at last, but there wasn't no stopping the whistling kid that night. In front of his swollen, smarting eyes mebbe there was a picture of little Tomasita. Anyway, he'd get to her if he died.

He damn near did. So did I. It ain't no fun talking about the three miles we went through that sand storm. It ain't even no fun thinking about it. But we made it.

Call it luck if you want to, but we bumped right into Granite Butte, bumped into it hard enough to hurt. Then Whistling Slim leaned over and hollered into my ear:

"She'll be 'round on the lee side if she's here!"

"She can't be here," I yelled back, but Whistling Slim was hobbling faster than ever. His heart was in his throat, I'll bet, and I could hear my own pounding and jumping all out of place. Round that b rock we felt our way.

On the lee side the wind wasn't so ba The sand swirled 'round there and dropp bushels of it every minute, but the g didn't take the breath out of our mout no more.

We didn't find nothing, not for two three minutes. Then Whistling Sli stumbled over something buried in th sand and there was a scream. Ye Tomasita. She had given Mex Pete th slip early, all right, and gotten to the butt just as the storm broke; the last hundr yards she made by crawling.

Slim didn't get up after he fell but h kind of nudged over to that little figu down in the shifting sand piles.

"Slim!" That was the girl's voice, shak ing with fear and joy and pain and lo else.

"Tomasita!" I heard that too, fro Whistling Slim, kind of thankful-like, a I stared at those two black blotches a then out over the desert where hell w riding high, wide and wild.

"God help those kids!" I thought, a kind of wondered if even God could g three insignificant human beings out of place like that.

NOT once, during that riproarin night, but fifty times I hollered those two black figures huddl under Granite Butte:

"Somebody'll find us! Sure somebo will."

Between times I would stand up a kick myself real hard for being such old fool as to come out without wate Criminy, what a fool! And not telling person where I was going, as if the secr would do me some good instead of pro ably costing me my valuable life.

"Somebody'll find us. Sure!"

I was lying by the clock and I knew i Hundreds of square miles of desert search, a norther which would last tw days at least and keep even sand lizard under cover and then—three little blac specks behind a rock for the searchers find! Well, someone *might* find us, b it would sure be after the coyotes a buzzards had first pickings.

Again in the morning—only it wasn morning, just another funny gray-yello night of stinging hot sand—I yelled out

"Yep, someone'll come and find us!" Then Whistling Slim looked at me out red slits that was eyes once and I could e he knew I was lying. And little Tomita turned toward me and tried to smile t her eyes was swelled shut and her s was so puffy and cracked and bleeding, d the blood had caked so hard with llow dirt, she just couldn't smile. But e knew I was lying, too. So those two ds crowded closer to each other while I pt arguing with myself every few years: "Somebody's got to find us!"

Sometimes my voice went bad and I uldn't say nothing 'cause I had splinters my throat and when the sound did come was a funny, sandy kind of sound like ried cactus waving in the gale.

The wind never stopped laughing at us d all of a sudden I had to laugh myself. omasita and Slim sure looked funny. o eyes left, no faces, just round patches caked mud above some dirty, twisted othes and bodies that was half buried in e sand like mumies. Sure, I laughed ly I couldn't make the sound come just ght.

Next I wanted to make a break for it. nd Whistling Slim managed to rasp out me:

"Suicide!"

But I started away from the rock, lookg for help. Mebbe I went sixty yards, ut I was sure glad to make a nose dive ck to cover again. After that I sat own and held my face in my hands while e sand blew down my neck and out my oots, burning a track all the way. I tried do some fancy thinking and planning, ut my brain was just sifting sand instead working.

After a while the wind sounded worse an ever and I looked up. It was Whistng Slim. Honest, man, he was pressing s big swelled lips against his teeth with s fingers so's he could whistle.

It wasn't no grand concert like Slim nerally puts on. Lots of notes were missg and only about one in five of the dible ones was up to standard—Slim's andard. Nope, but the kid tried hard d Tomasita nudged closer and patted s arm.

After another week or year or something got to be night again, and we was so l in and dried up that we slept a little. le, I dreamed first that I was a feather duster and then that someone gave me three drops of water for a million dollars. Then I woke up and knew that a million was too cheap for that water, but I was still a feather duster.

Scared? Nope, I was too far gone to be scared. I was just a bag of dried sand, without no life, waiting for the end. Little Tomasita and Whistling Slim was hand in hand, tighter than ever, and I pushed myself over to them. My voice came back for a minute or two and with it came a big idea. It was better'n an idea; it was a cinch. Mebbe I was cracked in the mind but I was sure as shooting about just one thing.

"Hershall H. Hall will find us!" That's what I hollered or tried to holler, and that's what I was so sure of. "Hershall H. Hall will find us!"

But those two kids didn't pay no attention.

It was another of those gray-yellow mornings and the wind was still blasting sand round us and over us so's we had to dig out once in a while. It was hollering and yelling and singing, too, something fierce. And all of a sudden I wanted to sing myself. I knew that was a bad sign but just the same I threw my head back and opened my mouth and let the songs roll out. Wonderful songs they were, too: "We Was Sailing Along on Moonlight Bay," and, "Mother, Mother, May I Go Out to Swim?" Funny thing, though, loud as I sang I couldn't hear my voice and when I looked at Tomasita and Whistling Slim I saw they couldn't hear me either. Well, I wasn't making no sound at all I guess, but the words of those watery songs just rang through my brain until I thought my skull would split open with the echo of them.

I got another bum idea, too. That wasn't sand out there in front of me. It was water. Yep, the very stream that used to flow through my dad's farm back in Arkansas. I could see the little eddies and the high banks; even the moss and roots of trees at the edge of the water. It wasn't sand in the air, either; it was rain. So I started out to swim. I remember that too blamed well. Threw myself down there and began to kick my arms and legs. But some way the water didn't feel good and then Whistling Slim came crawling to me and pulled me up. He dug the sand out of my mouth, too, and hit me a whack on the back. I couldn't say nothing but I knew what he meant and I caught hold of myself again.

After that I held on to one thought for years: "Hershall H. Hall'll find us!" All the time I knew there wasn't one chance in a hundred. By the time the norther was through with us we wouldn't be moving far, and unless the rescue party came straight to us we was done moving forever. "Hershall H. Hall will find us!" But he'd have to be a mind reader and a prophet and a magician all in one to find us in time at our present address—"Somewhere on the Mojave Desert."

Once I pried my eyes open and saw Tomasita and Whistling Slim clinging tight to each other and hanging on, hanging on to something bigger'n I had to hang on to. Then I let the black balloons which was floating around come down and smother me. Criminy, the blackness was good and a second after that there wasn't nothing to worry about. Just as those balloons burst I imagined I saw Hershall H. Hall riding out of everyone of them straight toward me and I tried to laugh, because there wasn't no chance he'd find us in time.

SOMETHING wet went down my throat and something wet was poured over my face. My eyes were washed out and after a while I could open them. There was a man leaning over me, a man with rusty red hair and blue eyes. Hershall H. Hall, of course.

For a minute I knew I was dreaming and shut my eyes again. After a while I began to absorb some sounds and then tried to take a look-see.

Around that granite butte was some horses and in front of the horses some men kind of floated around. Close to me, surer'n shooting, was Hershall H. Hall. And beside me Tomasita and Whistling Slim was being nursed by old Bill Galbraith who looked like he'd cry if he could stop swearing in time.

Something busted inside of me and I shut my eyes again. Voices pounded at my ear and then I knew I was being carried and under me I could feel a horse—something I never expected to feel again. After a long time I heard a big noise and opened my eyes.

We was at the Terrapin Rancho and in front was those assorted dudes. T was cheering and yelling—the Scand via Six-Day Bikers, the prima donna, ham actor, the sandpapered collegiate all those other freaks and fanatics. Ho some of those guys was kind of crying, at least there was tears in their eyes the prima donna and the female histo was sobbing away in great shape.

My heart gave a funny kick against ribs.

"They ain't such a bad lot," I "Bless their damn hearts, they ain't bad after all."

"Bad!" said Boss Keith right in ear. "Bad? Say, Buck, if it hadn't for one of those dudes the buzzards be pecking your gizzard right now. know what that Hershall H. Hall With eight hundred square miles of to search we'd never have found you you was dead. After Mex Pete came half dead and reported Tomasita was too, we hoped you'd got together and was going to start looking for you hit miss. We was sure we didn't have a ch in a hundred. But that fellow, that shall H. Hall, took us right to you minute the storm stopped."

"He must be a mind reader and a seer and a magician," I said. "But I he'd do it. Sure I did." After a I got curious and said, "How'd he do

"With a ruler and pencil and a m Boss Keith said and he kind of chuck when I opened my eyes and stared at like if he was crazy.

"Yep, a pencil and ruler and a You see, he figured that Tomasita Whistling Slim had planned to meet so where, so he drew a line on the map tween Bleached Cañon and the Terr Rancho. Then he asked me where was nearest minister or justice of the peace I told him at Cactus Siding. Then he d two more lines which made a triangle right in the white spot in the middle of triangle he put his finger. 'Our big ch is to find those kids right there,' he 'That's where they'd plan to meet. Is any landmark near that place?' I membered Granite Butte and told about it. Five minutes after the storm stopped we was riding hellity la for the very rock you three was dying hind."

With a ruler and a pencil and a map he
nd us," I said. "Sure, I knew he would
something like that. But," I said,
don't get the hang of the minister bus-
s and——"

'Well, Hershall H. Hall figured Toma-
and Whistling Slim would meet at a
ce real convenient to the marriage
emony, halfway between the rancho,
ached Cañon and Cactus Siding. Do
get me? He was right, only as it
ned out it was 'most a funeral instead
a marriage ceremony which happened."

For a little while I was quiet, while
y carried me into the ranch-house and
t me to bed. In the next room was
istling Slim and beyond him little
masita, bless her! I could hear them
ing real cheerful-like. Their strength
s coming back and they was happy as
ts because Papa Galbraith had ad-
ted in the weakness of the moment
t perhaps those two kids really did
e each other. You see, Slim had busted
ribs and wrenched his hip all out of
pe in falling over that barranca and under his horse. But he got to Tomasita all right, and then Tomasita and he just pulled through that hell together. With my help, of course, my help.

Outside I could hear the prima donna singing. She sure had a sweet voice. Then the actor made a speech and there was a lot of cheering. Those dudes was going to raise a purse or something for Whistling Slim.

*"Tre gange hurra!"* yelled the Scandinavia Six-Day Bikers, which, you'll find, is Scandinavian for "Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!" I could imagine the female historian taking notes and the sandpapered collegiate prancing round and all the other dudes acting joyful, bless their fool hearts.

But I wasn't thinking about them. I was thinking about Hershall H. Hall.

All of a sudden, then, I sat up straight in bed.

"What did I tell you?" I yelled down the hall. "What did I tell you? Course Hershall H. Hall would find us. Ain't he the greatest detective in the whole damn world?"

CAPTAIN DINGLE'S— PART T

### *Thrilling Serial of Whaling Days and South Sea Nights*

# SEA WORTHY

**_Preceding Events Briefly Retold_**

The *Cuttyhunk,* last of the deep sea whalers out of New England seaports, was fitting out for a last cruise for sperm. But old Peter Edwards, her owner, was sore at heart. For his son, Dick, refused to go to sea, disdained whaling, and no Edwards had ever before disgraced the fine family tradition of salt water sailors. Dick had good stuff in him, but he was wasting his youth at gambling and drinking.

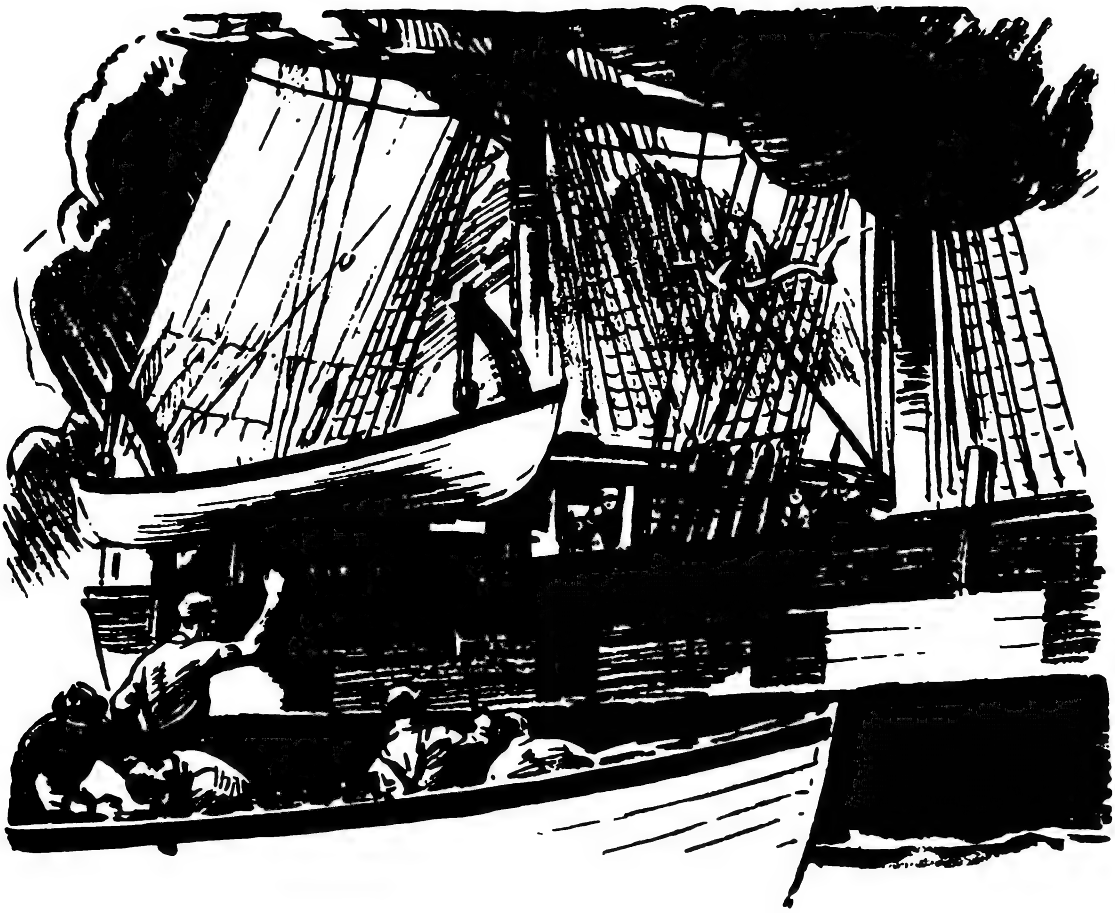
As a last resort Peter Edwards went to see Captain Turk, skipper of the whaleship, and offered him and the mate, Ben Barrett, a share apiece in the *Cuttyhunk* if they would take Dick to sea with them and bring him back a man. And so, that night Ben took two seamen with him and waylaid Dick. Dick fought like a wildcat and would have escaped but for the treachery of Yerner, a town rough who was Dick's enemy. They bundled Dick, unconscious, aboard the ship, and to repay Yerner for his treacherous help threw him in the hold, too.

When Dick awoke, the *Cuttyhunk* was far out at sea. Dick realized that he had been shanghaied and stumbled up onto deck and demanded that he be set ashore. Ben Barrett laughed at him. Dick lashed out and broke the mate's nose with a blow of his fist. Then Ben pummeled the lad until he was sick at heart and stomach.

So Ben Barrett set about making a man out of Dick Edwards. And gradually the lad got the hang of things aboard ship and began to like sails, and sea. Then one day a whale spouted near the ship and the boats lowered. Dick jumped into Ben Barrett's When they finally pulled up to the whale, D in the cockiness of youth, seized a lance drove it into the whale. And this th maddened the beast so that it scattered and crew over the sea with a sweep of its When they were finally rescued by the *Cuttyh* Ben humiliated Dick by spanking him.

Dick had been glad to find Yerner in a p similar to his own. But Yerner, instead of ta to the sea like Dick, plotted rebellion and ex with the dissatisfied members of the crew. often tried to enlist Dick's help, but Dick al turned a deaf ear. He had no love for Ye and his kind. And now, with the Horn sa rounded, Dick set himself to study naviga while Yerner and his cronies made plans escape. Ben Barrett mistook Dick for one the plotters and locked him up. To Dick was the last straw. Barrett was always hound him. Well, he would join Yerner now! so they plotted to seize the ship the first three boats were lowered for whale.

One day after a terrific storm they foun canoe floating almost under the bow of the And its occupant was a young girl! T aboard she told the captain the storm had bl her away from her island home. When the saw the lustrous pearl that hung about her the lust for easy riches was added to their g ing spirit of revolt.



# CHAPTER IX

## TREASURE!

HER single garment was damp. It clung to her like a scarcely wrinkled skin; it revealed her as a veritable sylph of the sea. But somehow it had none of the look of a garment that had survived such a gale as that which the *Cuttyhunk* just came through. And the girl herself might have just paddled her canoe out from a beach through a summer shower. Yet no land was in sight. The night was growing brighter all the while; the rain squalls had gone; the skies were clear. Still no land broke the horizon.

"Where's this Fulai?" Turk insisted, bringing her to the chart over which she peered with whimsical intentness. At the chartroom door a crowd of men looked in. Yerner in the front, his cronies pushing him.

"Get for'ard! Get to hellangone out o' here!" growled Ben Barrett, shoving Yerner back. Yerner gave way, but his eyes flickered back over his shoulder as long as he could see the girl. Other eyes saw that wondrous pearl, too, though perhaps none so keenly as Yerner appraised its value. It was a pear shaped gem of velvety black, hung to her slender neck by a hair thin gold chain—a chain such as old ladies of two generations ago hung their lockets on. The girl seemed unconscious of the fact that she wore ten cents' worth of clothes and two thousand dollars' worth of single pearl. As unconscious of one as of the other. She traced a slim forefinger across the chart, her lips parted moistly, her eyes flashing, her boyish breast slightly agitated.

"I don't see any name like Fulai," she said. Her eyes wandered swiftly, like a bird's. Turk watched her in blank helplessness.

"Can't you think o' the English name?" he grumbled. "No place for a girl, this old whaleship. How long have ye been adrift?"

"Oh, ever so long!" she answered, looking up into his face and smiling like a seraph. "I mean—I forget exactly. I ran away from my uncle for a joke, and got lost. You see—" she fingered the pearl carlessly— "I wanted to find the treasure——"

"Treasure? What treasure?" interrupted Hogg, whose eyes had never left the pearl or its wearer.

"Why, the store of pearls that this came from," she said. With a sidelong, tired glance at Turk she sighed: "Oh, I am so tired! Could you let me sleep a little while? Perhaps I can remember the English name of our island if I'm not so tired."

"What's this about treasure?" said Hogg, hungrily. Whaling had been slack.

"Come below, missy. I'll find ye a bunk," said Turk curtly. "Mebbe we can make something out o' your yarn in th' morning." To his lookouts he bawled anew:

"Aloft thar! You keep your eyes well skinned fer land!" To Hogg he said: "Keep a-joggin' till daybreak. And don't you fergit you're aboard a whaleship while you're dreamin' o' treasure."

Yerner, forward, talked excitedly to Dick, while the gang hovered near. Others of the watch snugged down in cozy corners about the waist, spinning tall yarns about other castaways picked up at sea; but none recalled ever picking up a smart young packet like this, with her pearl and all.

"We'll wait a while before pulling our stunt," Yerner stated. "If there's a slue of pearls like the one the kid's got——"

"Why share 'em with all these greasy blubber chasers?" Dick wanted to know.

"Yes, how about that?" chimed in one of Yerner's best adherents.

"Huh, maybe she ain't such a kid as she looks, neither," put forth one of the others who sided with Dick. He had escaped jail for criminal assault by getting himself shanghaied aboard the *Cuttyhunk*. "Let's pull it and take her along."

"I can take care of the kid, and you, too," growled Dick, turning savagely upon the man. "How about it, Yerner? Why wait?"

"Why wait, says I, too," Stoll said greasily. The ex-third mate had been the one to tell of brown skinned girls, flush of their loves as they were scant of clothes. Here, simply as one of them, he knew enough to side with Dick Edwards. As third mate he could ride rough over Dick; but even as a small boy Dick had put the fear of flying fists into older, but softer, Stoll. And now there seemed to be profit in joining the stronger party. It had been common gossip along the wharves at home that young Edwards had grown able to lick the tar out of Yerner. Yerner never would grow any more; Dick would, and was growing, fast.

"What I say is," Stoll went on, "wait till morning, and see what the kid has to say. That pearl on her is worth a skipper's lay on a bung full sperm trip. Besides, it's as easy to take the ship, now she's aboard, as it was before." Stoll grinned at Dick assuringly. "I'm with you, Dick, lad," his grin implied.

THE watch changed before the question was settled. By the time it could be raised again a new day had dawned; a day which found the ship jogging lazily with the wind abeam, and Captain Turk aloft at first graying of the night blackness, seeking all around the horizon for some speck which might solve his problem of an astounding passenger who had awakened him the moment the dawn promised to break, not to find her island but to ask him to tell her all about the ship. He had responded by tumbling into his clothes and running aloft at a sweating pace to try to sight the island she must have come from. While up there he saw a sperm whale's spout, and the whaleman rose to the surface in him.

"Lower, Mister Barrett! Lone whale a p'int on the weather bow! 'Bout a mile off."

Instantly the ship was alive. All thoughts of pearls were out, unless in Yerner and his precious gang. Dick leaped to the mate's boat, regardless, or forgetful of that previous experience; only eager to go. And the boat sped away. The ship started beating easily to windward after the boat. The girl was aft, on the skids, dancing on her toes, eyes alight, slim figure tense, hair flying wild in the morning air, watching the boat with her small, nervous hands clasped and shaking with excitement. More than one of Yerner's lot of rascals licked his lips. Stoll, glad that Dick was away, wondered how he might find an excuse to go up on the spare boat skids.

The girl was no more aboard that ship than Dick's father. She was out there, with Ben's boat, sprays flying and foam boiling, watching, with every vibrant inch of her, the flying cachalot, a bare hundred yards before the boat. Easy to see why she was not desolate when picked up. Easy to see that the sea, and romance, and the wild breezes had borne, bred and fed her. Stoll found a reason for going up on the skids—or at least an excuse. By the time he clambered up, she was at the mizzentop, all alight with sheer joy. Stoll could find no excuse for going up there. Besides, Captain Turk saw him, and Turk had no more use for him.

"Git down here, you, Stoll, an' overhaul the cutting tackles," he sang out, and Stoll sheepishly obeyed. The cutting tackles were tremendous fourfold blocks, each two men's burden, rove through with ropes as thick as a man's wrist. The mere handling of the tackles was a man's work. Stoll had never been a man, except by virtue of his father's name.

By the time the whale was struck, June was away up at the mizzentop gallant yard. She was as much at home at that lofty altitude as a small boy in an apple tree. And when, from the ship, it was seen that Ben's boat was in tow of a particularly hasty whale, nobody had much chance further of watching the girl. Captain Turk took active charge of the ship. The mate's boat was flying to windward in tow of the whale at a speed which promised a day and night out for the boat, and a day and night, if no more, of beating to windward in a sluggish breeze for the ship.

It was three days before the *Cuttyhunk* came up with the boat. Three days of dreary windward work in a light and falling breeze, under a sun hot as Sheol. Through all that time Turk never left the deck. He was a good whaleman, and a lost boat and crew was to him a catastrophe. All that time the girl, June, stayed beside him, getting tired as youth will, but recovering as swiftly. She insisting on feeding him, cajoling old Pluto into giving her a place at the galley stove to make the skipper's coffee and toast, bringing sustenance to Turk as he sagged in fitful sleep beside the skylight.

On the third day Ben Barrett's boat was sighted, fast to the whale. And it took the ship all that day to reach them. The whale was a long specimen, tremendous in girth. Until the ship came close it was to all appearances a fine catch. But as the ship rounded to, ready to haul alongside, it was seen that the whale was bloated by gas; was, except for inflation, just a poor skinny skeleton of a whale not worth the catching. And before the mate could carry a line to the ship, for the bringing of the whale to the fluke chains, the fish blew up from the gases within it, and sank, leaving ship, and sea, and sky, and boat shrieking witnesses to the explosion.

Three days lost. Another three days cleaning ship, and not a pint of oil for it. Captain Turk drove his mates, his mates drove the crew, so that between sleeping and waking no man had time to think of anything but getting his food and seeing that nobody robbed him of his sleep. To the girl, ever bubbling with curiosity, Turk was gruff and unfriendly. Ben Barrett, sore to the bone of him, remembered that Dick Edwards was on board for a specific purpose, and Ben got his consolation out of Dick.

He put Dick over the side to scrub pestiferous whale débris from the intricacies of the broad chain channels. He stood and watched the job. So did others, not any more fond of Dick. And the girl, June, sat in the captain's boat all day, swinging in the cranes, laughing at everything, but particularly at Dick, sweating there beneath her, cursing not alone to himself, black visaged, and blushing with hurt pride.

Dick finished his job and went to his supper, but with no fine feelings, no kind thoughts, no high ambition.

## CHAPTER X

### SMOLDERING

JUNE ONSLOW was a child who would blossom into womanhood very suddenly, when that time came. Born on an island so small that the sea was never beyond hearing of any part of it, only beyond sight because of verdure, she had grown up a veritable child of Nature, kin to the sea, the sky, the birds and fish. Taught by her father, self-exiled aristocrat playing benevolent trader, she had grown up a queer mixture of bright intellect, virile body, and romantic fancies. She had never seen her mother, to know her; for the tiny island was no place for a delicate woman to bring a baby into being, and the birth of June was the death of her mother. Her father, kindly, helpless, desolate in his bereavement, only stayed long enough to see his brother take over the little trading station and the care of small June; then went to seek his lost wife.

June's uncle was much like her father, except for one thing. He drank to drown memories of past and lost refinements of home. Drank too much. Left the child too much to herself. June had been well grounded in the elements of a good education by her father; and her uncle was willing enough to answer her eager questions, but he made no effort to teach her. He saw that she was well fed, and adequately clothed for the climate, and so far as he knew she was happy, running wild, swimming with the fish, wandering at will about the island, the friend and bright spirit of the islanders.

June was an avid reader, too, for all her activity. Often she carried a book from her father's rather complete library. Her favorite books were few, however; wildly romantic adventure stories of the sea, and islands, pirates, and treasure. She had read "Treasure Island" until she could recite whole chapters. She often did, much to her uncle's astonishment. He thought she was recounting some actual happening until he learned to know her better. And she would climb a palm, perch among the fronds, and fancy herself on the lookout at Mizzentop Hill, sitting there hour after hour, seeing in fancy whole fleets of galleons sail grandly past, conjuring up small, waspish brigantines and shallops full of corsairs in chase.

Now, aboard the ancient, unglamorous whaleship, she found her heart's desire. She was allowed to roam over the ship simply because Captain Turk was buried in the worries of his unsatisfactory fishing. Until that unlucky whale blew up after almost starving Ben Barrett and a whole boat's crew, there had been some idea of cruising about until this elusive island of Fulai was found and the girl landed. But that was several days ago. And from the moment the mate's boat was hoisted there had always been a spout or two in sight. The ship sailed doggedly in chase; but never a boat was lowered, never a whale brought near enough, in a week of sailing.

"See here, my lass, you might as well have a job, since you got to stay aboard a spell," said Turk, two weeks after she had come aboard. "You help the stoo'ard, and you kin have thet bunk o' Jed Roach's. He likes the main hatch better anyhow."

June's eyes danced. She gave the steward no rest until he showed her everything in his domain; and for one full day her work was faultless. After that she realized that stewards see little of the ship and the sea. The stuffy cabin, with its never absent reek of sperm, its scarred table and musty bunks, were no fit setting for a child of the sunny seas and blue skies. She soon learned that helping old Pluto would be much more to her notion of seafaring. And she took the job of pie making out of the steward's hands on the second day. On the third day she had bedeviled old Pluto into making the pies, while she flitted about the decks like a sun ray; always when Turk was out of sight. As for Ben Barrett, and Jed Roach, she had converted them to her side long ago. And Hogg had a notion that she might be fair game if he did not spoil her fun; he let her run. And all of them, even old Pluto, warned her whenever the skipper was about to appear.

Every day or so Turk made her look over the chart, trying to guide her in her search for the island. There was no island of Fulai anywhere near the spot where she was picked up; and Turk was suspicious of her story of being blown off in that gale. She was too fresh, too bubbling over with vitality, to have brought a canoe through that storm and then climb gaily up a rope to board a ship. But he failed to shake her. She traced her finger over the chart, lips parted like moist rosebuds, her big dark eyes glancing up sideways at him as she paused on islands which were called anything but Fulai, and always gave it up with a sigh:

"Oh dear! Won't it be dreadful if we never can find my island again?"

And Turk would growl:

"Don't you worry, girl. We'll find your island, all right!"

DICK talked with her, too. He found her utterly unlike any girl he had known. So different to those bobbed flappers of the Point. Not that she was any slower than they in repartee, or any duller of comprehension; she was not. June Onslow was as merry as a grig, as bright as a new steel trap, and could reveal unexpected strength when he held her arm, as he did at first. And Dick for the first time in his life, perhaps, realized that a girl could be sixteen years old, be full of vim and vitality, yet still be only a girl. That she could be a laughing, teasing comrade, and still remain utterly and genuinely innocent, not alone in person but actually in mind. That she could dress in the flimsiest of one piece cotton garments, and be entirely unconscious of the maturing figure it revealed; unconscious, too, of the very existence of sex.

Dick spoke to her one evening of treasure, gently touching the pearl about her neck. It was a calm evening, all soft gold and pink and blue. The *Cuttyhunk* headed into the sunset, scarcely moving, all her threadbare old sails sleeping, the sea rippling along her black sides with silken whisperings. A transparent breasted, yellow spike-tailed tropic bird sailed about her mastheads; its consort in wider circles sought for more promising food resources.

She laughed, musically, taking the pearl from his fingers, meeting his gaze with great wide eyes like dusky stars. She flung out a brown arm towards the sunset.

"Oh, yes! Big treasure, Dick. Not so far away from here."

"Pearls, like that?" he grinned. Wondrously he felt a complete comradeship with this Island girl. He had not, for a long time, known what it was to cultivate a girl's companionship without a sex motive. Here, he felt drawn to the girl out of sheer fellow feeling. And in Dick's case, to do him justice, he was as much interested in hearing her talk, seeing the play of light and shade in her piquant face, watching the aliveness of her slim body, as he was in the treasure that gave him excuse to talk with her. She turned from him, gazing straight ahead.

"Oh, pearls! There are islands and islands, whole lots of them in these seas, simply full of pearls. But my treasure is greater than pearls."

And to all his further questioning she would only reply with a merry laugh and a shake of her thick curly hair. He gave it up; but he told Yerner, and Yerner told the rest. They talked it over late into the night. And aft, Jed Roach spent a dazed hour in June's company, listening to such rippling chatter as he had never before enjoyed. He, too, ventured a word about treasure, and she laughed outright.

"Oh, what a funny crew! Treasure, treasure, nothing but treasure! And to think of the oceanful of treasure you sail over day after day. Why, of course, I know of treasure. I came to your ship to find it, but we're not near it yet."

Jed spoke to Ben, and Ben spoke to Turk. They had quite a hot and lengthy conference about it. Forward, Stoll and Yerner argued hotly against further delay. Dick was for leaving everything until June gave the sign. Yerner and Stoll were for starting something right away. And Stoll licked his thick lips as he heard June's laughter ripple out from the after shadows. The crew had divided into two gangs. It was impossible for some of them to be talking treasure and ship taking without the rest at some time getting to hear of it. The *Cuttyhunk* had been at sea ten months, and only two whales had been taken, and only one cut in; so that idle time had been generous. Nothing like an idle crew to nurse and bring to fruit an idle rumor.

"I SAY take the ship first time all three boats are away," said Stoll. "If we can get the Old Man away too, better yet."

"Huh! Fat lot of chance we'd have then," Dick grumbled. "Four boats away, where'd we be? I'm in the mate's boat. Two of you are in Hogg's. One in Jed's. If Turk lowers, he'll take two more besides his boatsteerer and two old hands. Besides, it'll be a year, as we go now, before we see even two boats away at once."

"If you be talkin' about this kid's tale o' treasure—" put in one of the solider crew, coming into the circle and thrusting between Yerner and Dick. And he went on to tell of what the balance of the crew thought. They were all talking. Ten months out, and only one whale cut in. It would be nearer six years than four before they were a full ship. He and his shipmates were for boldly going aft and putting the case up to the skipper. He was no fool, to heave overboard a chance to pick up a fortune. And if they didn't find it, why, it was easy enough to go on whaling again. Wouldn't lose more than a month or two anyhow.

Aft, Hogg was saying much the same thing. Jed Roach was silent. Ben Barrett had first of all vowed the girl was crazy. He thought there might be something in the story now. Turk was not so sure the girl was crazy; but he believed she didn't know, any more than he, where her island was.

"And if she don't know that, how in thunder can she tell us where this treasure island is?" he wanted to know.

"You've got the position where we picked her up," said Hogg, boldly. "You know, and we know, she never traveled more'n ten or twenty mile in that canoe. I say let's try it."

"We'll see about it in the morning," said Turk, tersely. He turned away, and on the cabin stairs sounded the tread of twenty bare feet.

## CHAPTER XI

### SHOWDOWN

AT ANY other time Turk would have cleared the cabin of intruders with a word and a look. Now as the men trooped in, shoving Yerner forward as spokesman, there was too palpable a feeling of community of interests for the skipper to be natural.

"What's the trouble, my lad?" he asked, frowning at Yerner. Yerner rated small stuff in the ship, and knew it; but safe in the backing of most of the crew, and rightly reading Turk's indecision, he put on a bluff front.

"All hands here want to know what you mean to do about that treasure the kid talks about, Cap."

"Ain't got but one whale in ten months' fishin'," grumbled an old whaleman who had never been out of debt to a ship in thirty years. "Ain't no sense turnin' up our noses at the gal's yarn until we gives it a look-see."

"That's what we all say," put in Stoll bravely. "Likely to be a year before we get oil enough to fry doughnuts. Take a look—that's what we say." Meeting Ben Barrett's stony eye full upon him, Stoll hastened to add: "Let all hands speak for themselves, Captain."

"Don't all yammer at once," Turk growled. "Shut up a minute. I'm willing to allow you might be right. But 'tis for me to say. We're fishin' in bad luck. That's true. Wuss luck than I ever 'countered. And if 'twasn't out o' the way I'd say——"

"Can't be out o' the way!" burst from Yerner. "Don't the kid keep on pointing west? We're sailing west, ain't we?"

"Ben," Turk said grimly, speaking to Barrett but looking at Yerner, "if that squid talks out o' turn again, run him on deck. Any o' the others, too."

"Don't try it!" a crony of Yerner's snarled from behind. "All hands is one minded in this. Come off the high perch or we'll——"

"What!" from Turk, fiercely.

Men hustled the bold one into silence, asking the skipper to carry on. Turk stared at them a moment, breathing hard, then resumed:

"This ship set out for sperm whale, my lads, and sperm I'm supposed to bring home. 'Tain't noways strange for a whaleship to cruise a year empty. But it never happened to me before. We've all heard about this gal's treasure island, aft as well as for'ard, and we been talkin' it over, I don't deny. And we're all on lay on a voyage for oil, even if our shares do vary a bit. One makes wages; we all make wages. If you don't make your iron dollars, nuther do I, nor Ben, nor anybody. So I'd say jest take a look into this treasure yarn, anyway——"

"That's the stuff!"

"Same as you, Cap!"

"I sez to Tom, I sez, Cap'n Turk's a man, I sez. . . ."

So the chorus went until Turk roughly stopped it.

"Shut up! I'd take a look if the gal knew within a thousand mile where the darn island was. But she don't. It's my idea she don't even know how far her own island was when we picked her up. So let's carry on after whales till the end o' the year; then if luck don't change we'll put in three months at the treasure hunt."

"Put in the three months now!" squealed Yerner, suddenly desperate. "What's the use crawling around the ocean after stinking whale blubber when we'll all be wearing diamonds if we find that island first? Am I right, boys?"

"Why can't we do both?" Dick put in, speaking for the first time. "We've sailed west ever since we found June, and she has always pointed to the west when she would talk at all. If she really knows of this treasure island, it's likely to heave in sight at any time on this course. Nothing to stop us lowering for whales if we sight 'em, and still keep on to the westward."

"To hell with blubber hunting!" shouted Stoll, red faced. "I've sliced my last bit o' fat until——"

Turk reached out a hand for Stoll, but Stoll now stood his ground. Plenty of voices backed him up. The men surged forward, and Turk and the mates realized that a crisis was at hand.

"Look for that island, Cap, or we'll go seek it ourselves," Yerner announced, and stepped beside Stoll. One man had brought a harpoon into the cabin, out of foolish notions of coercion. It had looked silly, gleaming up above his head in the lamp and tobacco smoke close to the beams. Now he pushed forward, holding his fearsome weapon at a slant, and for an instant it looked as if the noisy conference might turn to more than noise. Ben Barrett's broken knuckled fist jerked, ready to flash out and grip the harpoon if it came any nearer to a menacing position. Turk was clearly undecided. He was not frightened. It takes more than a clamor, or a harpoon, to frighten a man who has killed his cachalot with a hand lance from a cockleshell whaleboat. But he glanced in question at Ben and Jed and Hogg. They were with the men in thought; only the inherent difference between officer and man made them stand by the skipper; and Hogg was not so sure he wanted to be an officer that minute.

WHILE the skipper briefly sought inspiration from his mates, and the men shuffled about the table, wanting to be bad but not yet quite brazen enough, June stepped from her tiny cabin into the circle and faced Yerner, the last speaker, with a big eyed gravity that sat strangely upon her. She was hot and flushed, and her lips quivered.

"You are a lot of foolish men," she said. "I have been listening. You are all making idiots of yourselves. There is no treasure! There is no island! Why do you big grown men believe a girl's silly fancies and make great issues of them? I tell you I do not know of any treasure. I told Dick of a treasure I knew of. It was the sunset, the breeze, the sea; it was just living! Oh, can't you see how silly you are?"

For a moment the cabin was hushed. Then Stoll thrust his fat body forward, his fingers on Yerner's arm for support.

"That's a fine yarn!" he yelled with a laugh of derision. "The kid's scared now and means to bilk us out of it so she can tip off her particular fancy man to it. Tell that yarn to the horse marines," he snarled at June, who shrank back looking for the first time afraid of the men. He suddenly turned to the stairway. "Come on! Let's handle this thing our own way."

The men bundled out, and June clung to Turk, speaking incoherently to him. He saw tears in her eyes for the first time. But even Jed Roach showed that he was uncertain how to take her change of story. Hogg palpably disbelieved her. Barrett and Turk regarded her curiously. Dick paused after the men left, as if seeking for a chance to speak to the girl; but he turned at last, and leaped on deck after them, bursting in upon the milling gang as they surrounded Yerner and his special mob of hoodlums at the tryworks.

"What are you going to do?" he demanded, grabbing Yerner by the breast slack of his shirt.

"Keep this old blubber hunter heading west until we make that island," Yerner vociferated. "No lowering for whale either!"

"And let 'em try to stop us!" yelped a voice behind the tryworks. From old Pluto's galley came the mumbling of toothless gums in prayer; and the hiss of a knife blade on a sharpening steel.

Dick, who had really begun to take an intelligent interest in the business of whaling, and sailing a ship, was not so blindly susceptible to the lure of gold that he could not reason. He had thought a good deal about this mysterious island which bade fair to set a lubberly old whaleship by the metaphorical ears. He had heard the girl's agitated disavowal of the treasure island's existence. And it had made him think, even if it did not quite convince him.

"Listen, fellows," he said, earnestly. He shook Yerner. "Listen, Yerner. Forget about whether this yarn's all wool, or whether it's dream stuff. Just for a minute. Suppose it's the goods. How do you expect to find an island not on the chart just by sailing west? I know enough of navigation to know it's foolish to look for any such fly speck in such a dumb fashion. There are a million islands scattered around this ocean. You can't stop at every one."

The ship had been slowly moving. The helmsman had followed the rest into the cabin. Now the *Cuttyhunk*, untended, swung into the wind and shivered all her canvas in the light breeze. There was no officer on deck. Dick realized the situation first; and instinctively started aft to take the helm. He heard the shouts that followed him, some taunting, some angry, all antagonistic. But the men stayed with Yerner and Stoll. Dick would talk to them again later. Meanwhile he kept the ship's head at west, which had been her course before. And he gave much thought to the problem that had divided the crew. He wanted to speak to the skipper.

He heard voices coming through the skylight. Turk was arguing with Hogg. Ben Barrett and Jed Roach put in a word now and then, but the argument rested with the second mate and the skipper. The few words said by Ben or Jed were clearly born of a state of mind which believed in the treasure but leaned towards loyalty to the ship.

"I'll hold on west, and let 'em land on the first island they sight, and that's the most I'll do!" stated Turk at last. "Meanwhile, if whales are raised I'll lower for 'em, and I'll keep on lowerin' for whale until I have a full ship, and then I'll put out for home. I believe the gal's tale o' fancy dreams more'n I do of treasure. Now one o' you git up on deck. Hob's boots! Who's on watch?"

"I signed second mate o' this ship, and I'll be second mate," grumbled Hogg, lurching into the companionway. "But I didn't sign to get a harpoon through me, and I won't fight no mutineers, Cap'n Turk. And if so be as they seek and find this here treasure, Bully Hogg ain't going to let no second mate's pay stand between him and his share. And that's as far as I'll promise. Let others do as they've a mind to." He slung that at Jed and Ben and lumbered up to peer into the binnacle, still growling.

## CHAPTER XII

### MUTINY!

DICK went forward after another helmsman relieved him later, wondering. The relieving helmsman was one of Yerner's gang; but he took the wheel, repeated the course, and gave no sign of rebellion against routine. Dick wanted to know how he rated now. And he went to Yerner's bunk and shook him into surly wakefulness, putting his question.

"You'll find out soon enough," growled Yerner.

"Do you mean to carry on with this darn foolishness of treasure hunting?"

"Wait till we sight the island. Nothing'll pop till then. We can do without you. Please yourself."

Dick was sure of one thing: there was no treasure island. He had come to that conclusion. But Yerner and his malcontents thought differently. That was sure, also. Anyhow, if they had decided to carry on until an island, any island, was sighted, as was suggested by the manner of the relieving helmsman; there would be time in daylight to speak to the skipper and get his views. Meanwhile, there was the crew, definitely divided even among themselves; and the mates too. Miss June Onslow had brought plenty of unrest to the easygoing old *Cuttyhunk* when she rose dripping from the sea with her fairy story of an island home of which she did not know the name and her preposterous tale of vast treasure always to the west.

Dick crawled into his bunk to close his eyes and think. And try as he might he could not wipe from his mind's vision that big gleaming pearl that hung by its slender gold chain from the girl's round, sun kissed neck. That pearl alone was bait enough for the sharks that flocked around Yerner's leadership.

Another day broke, hot and calm, and the ship sailed serenely west. The only indication remaining to tell of the uproar of the night before was a slackness about the ship's work. The mates made no great efforts to drive the men; and there was little really to do. All the whale gear was in order and ready. Long spells between lowering boats for whales had given every opportunity to see to that. And as for the ship herself, she swam along with her threadbare fine weather canvas barely full of wind but aglow with sunshine, requiring little attention other than steering.

Old Pluto stayed in his galley as much as he could, and there was always a cleaver, or a blubber knife close to his hand. The girl had given up her various jobs. When she appeared on deck at all, it was with Turk, and she was subdued and quiet. Whenever Yerner, or any of his pals, passed near her, she had none of the boyish impudence and roguish glance that first distinguished her. She was uneasy, if not afraid.

Dick waited for Turk to come down from aloft. Every day, at first clear light, the skipper climbed to the main truck and swept the ocean through the long telescope. Turk was still the keen whaleman. He was longer aloft this morning; and while Dick waited, June crept from below, watched her chance to avoid others, and ran to his side, catching his hands with both her own small hot ones.

"Dick," she said hurriedly. "Dick! You must make these men believe there is no treasure island. It was all make-believe." She caught his glance, resting on the pearl at her neck. "Even this is make-believe!" she cried, holding the globule up to the sun. Some of the men forward caught the gleam of it and drew together, whispering. Dick saw them and quietly bade the girl leave it off when she went below again. She slipped it inside her dress, and went on, more subduedly, but earnestly:

"I thought it fun to paddle off to this ship. It was the first ship I'd seen in two years. You know it was awful lonesome with uncle. He's drinking a lot. And there are no other white people on the island. Nothing for a girl to do except swim and fish and read. And there is only one book I could read and enjoy. I've read it until I know 'Treasure Island' by heart!"

"But you didn't take that canoe through the storm?"

"No. I didn't see your sail until near sunset after the wind stopped. Then there were rain squalls all around. But I am not afraid of the sea. I wanted to speak to people again. Our trade hut was blown down by the wind, and uncle was—well, he was not well. He was drinking too much. And I thought as soon as I climbed on board what fun it would be if I could keep going on with the ship. So I kicked my canoe under. Then I was afraid I'd be landed at once. I was glad when the rain squalls prevented you seeing the island. It's very tiny. Volcanic. So I made up a story of treasure when somebody noticed my make-believe pearl——"

Dick was regarding her curiously. She made haste to drive home her point, fearful that he, like the others, would not believe her.

"It is only fish scale, Dick. The chain was mother's. If I knew about a treasure, I'd have told uncle, wouldn't I? My treasure is all the sea, the outdoors, the wind and the blue skies. I was silly to leave the island, I know. It was a sudden whim, and I'm sorry now. But those men look as if they would kill me to get even this imitation pearl. I'm afraid of them."

"Don't let 'em worry you," said Dick, gruffly. Turk was a long time up aloft. Old Pluto was dishing up the cabin breakfast. "Why did you tell the captain you didn't know the English name of your island?"

June colored, and the ghost of her natural smile played around her lips.

"I was afraid I'd be taken back at once. And I was so excited at being on a real ship." She seemed about to go right on chatting again. A thought stopped her, and she became grave once more. "But I'll tell him the right name now," she said and let her wistful glance follow Dick's to the main truck, where Turk clung, legs wrapped around the royal rigging, twenty feet above the crow's nest, his telescope fixed on the western horizon. The skipper quickly shut his glass, letting it hang by the sling, and uncoiled his legs. He started down, by the rapid transit of the royal backstay, and in the same instant roared:

"Blows! She blows! Lone sperm—three points lee bow—four mile off!"

THE three mates ran to their boats: Ben Barrett to the larboard boat, Hogg to the waist boat, and Jed Roach to the forward or bow boat. And they ran alone. Not a man stirred to take his place in the boat he belonged to. And

Captain Turk landed on deck with a thump, at first not realizing the trouble. Ben Barrett got the idea quicker. Ben left his boat, picking a belaying pin out of the mizzenrail, and bustled over to where the men lounged in insolent indifference.

"Jump! Consarn you! Git to your boats," growled Ben.

"Jump overboard! And what are you going to do about it?" came the derisive retort from Blazes, Yerner's chief aid. The mate was brave enough. He moved forward, belaying pin clubbed; Jed Roach backed him up, barehanded. Hogg remained by his boat, undecided. But Blazes shoved a razor-keen cutting spade at Ben's breast, and even Ben dared not face that murderous weapon. It would take off his head with the merest forward thrust as easily as old Pluto would lop off bread dough. Ben backed away, edging towards Turk, bidding Jed and Hogg follow. It seemed natural for the afterguard to gather together; there lay safety, and enforcement of discipline.

But Turk had taken in the amazing situation, almost unparalleled in the whaling business, of a lean ship, with sperm whales in sight, almost a year out for only one fish, and the crew refusing to lower. It had been known but not often. He turned purple in the face: leaped to his own boat, the starboard one, which was only sent away normally after the three larboard boats.

"Away starboarders!" he roared. "I'll see if there ain't four oarsmen and a harpooneer among the b'ilin' o' scum! Lower away!"

The captain's boat was manned by the solid men of the crew. The last boat called into action always, Turk had no need to be at the trouble of breaking in green hands nor the time. The carpenter, the blacksmith, the cooper were his boat's backbone. They were in their places as soon as he roared the order; they had never cast their lot with either side in the disturbance; and because Yerner regarded them as old fossils, harmless and dumb, their opinions had not been bothered about. Dick made a move to join them; then backed away as inconspicuously as he could. He had thought of June. If the skipper left the ship, the girl might not be altogether safe. Ben Barrett saw him start and back down; grinned, nodding. Two other elderly men clambered into the starboard boat, and it was afloat and away smartly. When it was clear of the ship, heading down wind with sail set, Turk bawled back to the mate, who was standing, bewildered, before the rebellious crew.

"Have a man aloft to keep track and signal us, Mister Barrett! Bring the ship along after us. Reckon you kin do that much."

It was a sly knock, and Ben Barrett knew it. He turned savagely to the gang, ignoring the recent display of insubordination they had given.

"Up aloft, thar!" He singled out Stoll. Stoll laughed and spat. Ben had turned, as soon as the order was given, to bellow to the helmsman to keep away in the wake of the boat. The fellow laughed, too, holding the ship to her course. The mate saw that Stoll meant to bluntly disobey orders; and that was Ben's limit of patience. Daring the threat of the cutting spade, the mate reached for Stoll. The ruffian handling the spade drew back, not tough enough to deliver the stroke which could mean nothing less than murder. Ben grabbed Stoll, scared now, by the fat of his ribs, and began to draw him forward to the range of the other hand, all fisted, ready and quivering.

"Look out, Ben!" yelled Dick then. It was too late. A man on the skids thumped Ben on the head from above with a cooper's mallet, and the mate fell stunned. In a moment more the gang swept Jed Roach and Hogg to the bulwarks and roped them up. Old Pluto slammed shut his galley door. Dick ran aft, hoping to reach the cabins in time to warn June to lock herself in. Surprisingly he gained his objective. And as he ran below, he heard Stoll noisily announcing that he, Stoll, was taking command of the ship by virtue of his previous rank. He heard Blazes profanely assert Yerner's claim. And he heard Yerner's rejoinder:

"Hold your horses, fellows. This is where we need a navigator, not a fat lump o' lard booted out of the aftergang. Wait till I get Dick Edwards. He can sail this ship for us."

"Hell! He's a damned shyster!" growled Stoll.

"Never mind," snapped Yerner. "He's going to do what I ask him. Take care o' that mouthy mate."

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE ISLAND!

"YOU'LL keep your paws off June, Yerner! That goes for your gang, too," Dick told Yerner, in the cabin. Yerner had demanded Dick's decision.

"The kid can go fish if we find her island," Yerner laughed contemptuously. "At least, until I have time to play. Question is, what are you going to do? Are you with or against us, Edwards? You've been hot and cold long enough."

"Come on deck. I'll give all hands my answer."

To the gang, gathered about the try-works, Dick reeled off a chatty little speech which surprised himself.

"I told you nobody could find an island that don't exist, just by sailing west," he told them. "Navigation ain't magic. I can't find a treasure island that's only in a silly young kid's head. Sail west! From where? I told Yerner there are thousands of islands scattered over the Pacific. D'you want to stop at all of them? You're a bunch of rummies, if you ask me; sailing off with the ship and leaving the captain adrift. It's mutiny, that's what this is. You've assaulted the mates——"

"Cut that out!" snarled Blazes, still holding onto the cutting spade. "Make him talk our language, Yerner." There were growls from the rest, and Yerner bade Dick answer.

"You can sail west as well as I can. As well as Captain Turk could," said Dick. "But if you must have a headpiece aft, I'll sail the ship until we sight land—on one condition."

"Condition nothing!" barked Kopp, whose mallet had downed Ben Barrett.

"Come on with it!" urged Yerner, impatiently.

"You obey orders so far as sailing the ship is concerned. You loose the mates. And every greasy one of you stays out of the cabin." Dick glared at the gang as he spat out that last condition.

"Where's your quarters, Dick?" Yerner asked.

"Aft!"

"He wants to have the gal to hisself!" Kopp sneered. "He'll soft soap her and——"

Dick made a swift, sliding forward movement, drove his fist into Kopp's face with all the sinewy force in his lusty seventy inches, and Kopp's mallet flew into the air. Kopp fell backwards through the scattering mob, his broken nose streaming red, and collapsed, terrified, alongside prostrate Ben Barrett.

"Haw, haw!" guffawed Ben. "If you ain't the nose bustin' hellion, Dick! Bust some more of 'em!"

Kopp rose. He was not afraid of a bound man. He kicked Ben in the stomach viciously and slunk around behind the crowd as far from Dick as possible. But the blow had staggered more than Kopp; there was more respect in Yerner's tone.

"All right, then. You live aft, and sail the ship to the island, Dick. If you play straight with us we'll play straight with you. But the mates stay tied till we decide what to do with 'em."

"How about Captain Turk and his crew?"

"Leave 'em row home!" bellowed Blazes. "To hell with 'em!"

"I'm pretty sure what you've already done is a hanging job when you get home," Dick told them. "If you let that boat go adrift, there's no doubt that you'll all hang. Talk that over, too."

"Ah ain't gwine cook fo' no murderers, Misto Dick!" old Pluto yelled through the window of his barricaded galley.

"We didn't agree to no killin', neither!" grumbled one of the older men. Other voices muttered. Yerner turned, snarling upon the waverers; but he was not a born leader of men, and his mere glance was not forceful enough to quiet the murmur. Dick grinned.

"Go talk it over with 'em, Yerner," he said. "Plenty of time yet to pick up the boat. And how about letting the mates loose if I stand security for them? They'll be safe then. If they get loose themselves, you can't tell what they'll manage to do to you."

"I'd give something to know just what you're cooking up, Edwards," Yerner said, suddenly turning to glare at Dick. "Don't even think of crossing me. You ain't man enough to whip the crowd, big though you are."

"I'm sailing you to the island," laughed Dick. "As far as that I'm with you. And I give my share of the treasure freely in return for the privilege of keeping my sanity and taking care of that poor kid whose silly romance has sent you all maggoty. How about loosing the mates?"

"Sail the ship. I'll let you know in five minutes."

THERE was no trouble about sailing the ship. The helmsman steered west readily enough; and Dick, much as he felt urged to, knew better than to try any such trick as altering the course towards the distant boat. The captain's boat had fastened to the whale; it was five miles away already, and going like a motor launch in tow of the monster. Dick stood watching that distant speck, and the helmsman seemed to gather what was in his mind.

"Don't try no queer stuff, Dick, or you'll be sorry," the man said, and turned to spit over the taffrail. Dick knew the advice was sound at that moment. He made no retort, but ran down the narrow little stairway into the cabin.

"June!" he called sharply. The girl knew his voice and opened her door.

"Oh, Dick! Somebody has been down here, trying all the doors," she said in a sort of awed whisper.

"Bother you?" he snapped.

"He tried my door, but went away at once. I heard him go into the other cabins, though. Oh, what is going to happen to us, Dick?"

Dick scrutinized her keenly. The girl was queerly silent. It was not fear exactly; rather awe at the results of her impulsive act in boarding the ship, and her thoughtless romancing about treasure.

"At present you're all right, June," he said, gravely. "And as long as I can bully Yerner you'll be safe enough. But unless I'm with you, stay in your room; and holler like fury if you want me. Don't squeak, kid, holler!"

"Kid!" she echoed, widening her eyes indignantly. But he was serious. She realized that things were bad enough when he wore that look.

"I've not got their word yet," he went on, "but I'm to know in a few minutes whether I'm to have charge of you for my share in the treasure . . . Don't laugh, June. They believe in it absolutely, and they're hot about it! I asked them for that privilege and for the release of the mates. They've tied up Ben Barrett and Hogg and Roach, and they're sailing away and leaving Captain Turk adrift in his boat five miles to loo'ard. Don't ask me how grown men can be such damn fools. Even Hogg is inclined to believe in that treasure yarn. And I'm not sure that Barrett don't. Jed Roach would believe it if I told him to. He thinks I've got brains because my father once licked him when both were lads! But you go to your room and keep the door tight. Yerner's likely to be down any minute, and I want to look into the cabins first. Don't open your door for any voice but mine or old Pluto's. And keep smiling."

The girl jumped forward and dabbed a wet, grateful kiss on his cheek, then obeyed his direction. Her key turned, and Dick hurried to search the officers' berths for weapons. He knew Turk had a pistol. Barrett was likely to have one, though very likely it would be rusty and unloaded. Ben was like that. He had little use for the gangster's friend. Only a yellow coward needed a pistol in man to man affairs. Ben believed that. Hogg was almost sure to have a gun of some sort. Men like Hogg and Stoll usually carried a gun, or knuckledusters, or some such aid to authority.

But Dick drew blank, and it was easy to see why. In every little berth signs of recent and hasty searching were visible. Turk's clothes lockers were emptied and the contents scattered. Dick stepped and almost fell on a revolver cartridge just inside the door. Brackets over the broad swinging bed, meant to hold a shotgun or rifle, were empty. Dick found nothing but littered effects in the other rooms. He wrenched open the stand in the main cabin, which usually contained the bomb guns not in use in the boats. The fearful and expensive bomb guns were not placed in a boat until it was to be lowered after whale. The stand was empty. Somebody had done Yerner's bidding with thoroughness and dispatch.

DICK went on deck again, baffled, and Yerner met him by the skylight. Yerner was bruised, and a scratch ran redly down his face from hair to lip. One eye was blue ringed and fast closing. Dick grinned at that. But it was a different Yerner now. Yerner wore the air of a gang leader. Perhaps the bulge at his waistbelt under his shirt had something to do with his assurance. There had been no uproar nor audible conflict while Dick was below; but Yerner undoubtedly had pulled something on his comrades, for the gang stayed forward, scarcely looking aft. The three mates, too, had disappeared from the deck. Yerner did not wait for Dick to question him.

"I've dumped the mates into the blubber room," he said with a swagger. "Four of the gang, too. Didn't know their minds, so I showed 'em. Now it's your turn, Edwards. The mates stay put where I put 'em. And the Old Man's boat can row clear to hell for all o' me. You'll navigate this ship where I tell you, and like it, and if I feel like chatting with the kid she'll come out and chat. So that's that."

Dick measured Yerner up and down, and Yerner's eye was not bold enough to meet his gaze.

"Don't get the notion that you scare me just because you swiped all the guns, Yerner. You can't sail the ship without me, and you know it. And I won't sail her a fathom unless I have entire charge of this end of the ship, and the girl is left alone. If you tie me up you'll lose the ship. You haven't guts enough to bump me off. And the first man to force the door of that girl's room will get a harpoon in his gizzard. So that's that! Help yourself."

June had no harpoon. But she could hear their talk as they stood near the open skylight, and Dick hoped she caught the idea clearly enough to at least threaten if ever her door were assailed. Yerner was at a loss. He knew Dick spoke only the truth. They couldn't do without a navigator. Neither of the mates could take a sight. Even Turk had been compelled to call in Dick when a star sight was required. And after all, the girl could be left in Dick's charge until the island was found. Time enough to attend to her when the digging was done.

"Your trick," Yerner grumbled at last. "But no funny stuff! I'm heeled." He uncovered a revolver butt inside his shirt. "We've got more guns among the gang. You'll never know where the guns are until you get a pill, so don't get gay. Until you anchor us at the island you're safe—unless you act up."

The ship sailed on faster as the day wore along and the breeze freshened. The captain's boat had long since vanished. Dick sent three men aloft to the lookouts; not with any notion of zeal, but sure at least of that many men less on deck. He had a vague idea that something might turn up and give him a chance to take the ship and do something grand for the mates and the skipper. But nothing happened. The men aloft thought he was eager to bring them to their island, and they kept their eyes bright. When the sun sat on the western horizon, like a big copper plate, they knew he was playing straight with them. For there lay palms, spidery and tiny in the distance, black tracery on the sun's broad face.

"Land ho! Land ho! There's the island!" the lookouts yelled.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE STRANDING

THAT was a strange anchoring. Men who had been dubious right up to that moment, following the gang because they were gang followers by nature, whooped and yelled at sight of that tiny island. Yerner and Blazes and their closest cronies danced around Dick in praiseful glee. They would have whacked him on the back ecstatically but for a certain look in his eye which irresistibly reminded them of Kopp's broken nose. The men in the blubber room, whose lukewarmness towards the mutineers' cause had got them thrown below, pricked up their ears. Mr. Hogg, suddenly assured of his own mistaken loyalty to the ship, mumbled under his breath his altered opinions. Even Ben Barrett and old Jed Roach felt a subtle tremor of doubt run through them at that lusty shout of "Land ho!" None of them had really expected to sight that island down in the west. Now all of them believed that June's treasure island lay there before them. Dick was the most surprised of them all. He tried to look as if he had known all the time; but he felt far otherwise.

"Get the anchors ready!" he shouted, to break up the hilarity. He wanted time to think. That island against the sunset meant only one thing in the present state of the *Cuttyhunk's* crew; barren or fertile, deserted or teeming with inhabitants, the ship could never leave it until it had been turned upside down in a silly search for a mythical treasure. It meant that the moment the anchor went down the gang would pile ashore. It might be possible, barely possible, that with Ben Barrett and the other mates, and those men now with them, the ship could be carried to sea again. Then it might be possible to find and pick up Captain Turk's boat. With that accomplished, they could certainly take the ship where they liked, and leave the mutineers on the island to their digging, or hold off until Yerner got tired and begged to be taken aboard again, a prisoner with all his gang.

First, though, the ship must be taken safely to the island anchorage. Dick looked in the "Pacific Pilot," trying to identify the place. The reckoning was not very recently pricked off. All the places mentioned, of which this might be one, were mere islets, or barely visible reefs. There were plenty of such; and the only one that seemed big enough to show palms against the sky was enclosed in a reef, to which there was a fair opening. All the bits of coral or volcanic land thereabouts were marked on the chart simply by crosses, dots, broken circles, or bare specks of outlines. He could not be sure of this place. He had not acquired that much confidence yet; though he believed he had. He was game enough to sail the ship in anyhow, whether he knew or not. And he knew all about taking soundings.

Men got an anchor over the bows and shackled on, making work easy with antics and joking. The sunset glow faded and the sea grew dark; the island faded from sight with the sun. But they knew it was there, right where the sun had set. West. It chanced that the ship's latitude was the same as the sun's declination, so the sun had set fairly in the west, right over the jib-boom. It all helped to fix the treasure in their minds. Nobody could have convinced that crew of the nonexistence of June Onslow's treasure island.

"Get the leadline, one of you, and stand by for a cast," Dick ordered as the ship floated nearer to where the reef must rise.

There were few men left on deck who knew the marks of a leadline. The real sailors were either in the blubber room or out there in Turk's abandoned boat. And most of the gang were content to know the island was near, ignorant of reef dangers, scarcely likely to care. The helmsman like the rest was too eager for landing to bother about steering to a hairline.

A man did get into the fore chains and heave the hand lead. It was the deep sea lead Dick wanted. That twenty fathom hand lead would give no warning until right on top of the reef.

"No bottom!" yelled the leadsman. Then: "Lead's gone, Dick! Oh, to hell with it!" and the man leaped inboard to gather with the gang again.

Dick shrugged his shoulders. The dark line of the island could be seen against the stars now. Occasionally the murmur of surf was deepened to a sonorous boom. The night breeze was but an air which blew the old whaleship slowly forward. It might be morning before they anchored. He took the wheel, telling the helmsman:

"You might as well be with the gang. The way you're steering you're as likely to pile the ship on the reef as not."

THE surf seemed tremendously louder suddenly. There was a strong current underneath the ship. Dick could feel it tugging at the rudder. Forward, the dark shapes of the men could be seen in a cluster, just abaft the foretack. The island loomed large, and Dick swiftly hove up on the helm, startled by the ghostly gleam of phosphorescence right alongside. Flashes darting away from the ship were sharks, and reef fishes. The gleam turned to the white of breaking seas; the murmur of surf became thunder. And as the ship paid off to her helm, the white stretched away on both sides. Dick had stumbled upon the entrance to the reef, by sheer blind luck.

"Get the sail off her!" he yelled. "Stand by the anchor, two of you. Make 'em jump, Yerner, unless you want to wreck the ship!" He ran to let go the mizzen topgallant and topsail halliards, and the staysails, bawling as he darted across the deck from rail to rail.

"Haul up the courses! Let everything run! Damn your wall-eyes anyhow! All hands on lookout, and——"

Gently the old *Cuttyhunk* lurched on a long swell running through the entrance. The island seemed right under her bowsprit. Yards slid down, jib and staysail anks rattled on stays. And just when Dick wound himself up to a fine pitch of abuse, the ship came to a shuddering stand and the unbroken swell ran in past her.

"Let go that anchor!" yelled Dick. "Let it go!" He believed the gang would come after him, blaming the stranding on him. And to forestall them he meant to keep them hopping. He wanted that anchor down anyhow, in case the ship swung clear, and to keep her from driving farther aground if she remained fast.

Nobody obeyed him. Nobody bothered about him. The gang rushed upon the boats like released schoolboys and cast off the falls. In two minutes after the ship touched the reef, two boats were halfway down the ship's side. In five minutes, every man on deck but Dick was ashore. Dick went and let go the anchor, letting it lie underfoot with some chain ranged on deck; and the night was noisy with crazy men. As soon as he had secured the windlass and had time to straighten up and breathe, the idiocy of the thing struck him and he stood there laughing. Already the clearer headed of the men on the beach had recovered some vestige of sense in the black darkness and silence. Conflicting shouts were echoing among the palms; unrestrained at first, they soon dwindled to a more cautious pitch when somebody mentioned possible savages. Dick knew they would soon realize the futility of that blind assault on an unknown island. They would come back to the ship. They had no marks, for there were none. If they really had some clue to a real hoard, they could not follow it in the dark. If they followed it and found anything to encourage them, they had no tools. They would come back. Meanwhile there was the ship, aground.

Ben Barrett! He'd know what to do. Dick tumbled into the blubber room, taking the binnacle lamp, and swiftly cut the men loose. Four seamen and three sore mates stood up and stretched their cramped limbs.

"The ship's fast," Dick told the mate. "The whole gang's ashore. They'll be back any minute. It's our chance!"

Ben was out on deck quickly, Dick at his heels. Ben tried to visualize the situation, but could not. It was too dark. Dick suggested they all go to the cabin, to talk the thing over. He wanted June to hear their voices, to reassure her after the disquieting jar of the stranding. She might come out a while, too.

"We ought to be able to keep 'em out of the ship until they come to their senses," Dick said.

Ben stumbled down the companionway, muttering. He went straight to his berth, and swore at the evidences of rummaging. But he stuck his hand down under his mattress and brought out what the searcher had missed: an ancient revolver, rusty, as Dick had expected. To Ben, it was as useful as any other gun. That was Ben's attitude towards firearms. Rust meant little to him in a thing he never meant to use.

"It'll scare 'em, anyhow," Ben growled, trying, by peeping into the cylinder, to see if it were loaded. Some greenish bullets showed their snub noses near the cylinder end, and that satisfied Ben. He stuck the gun in his belt and stepped back into the cabin. Dick called June, and she opened her door; her eyes sparkled. There was mystery in this, and adventure. Romance . . . Jed Roach was standing at the table, but nobody else had come down.

"Where's the rest? Where's Hogg?" the mate demanded.

The soft cheeping of well worn sheaves crept down from above. Dick and Ben and Jed looked at each other. All three crashed into the stairway together. They tumbled out on deck in a heap. Then they peered foolishly out over the rail at the spidery shadow of the third and only remaining boat, hurrying shoreward to the tug of the four seamen's oars, steered by Mr. Hogg. And Mr. Hogg was shouting already to tell Yerner and his gang that the boat bore friends.

## CHAPTER XV

### DIGGING DUST

"YOU hed to pile her on the reef, didn't you?" Ben growled. It was a silly remark, with no reason behind it. But even Dick could not take offense at it. There seemed nothing else to say at the moment. Besides, Ben Barrett was the mate, in command now that Turk was lost. Dick had but done his plain duty in setting Ben free. Any mate, any skipper, would probably have said just what Ben said on finding his ship sitting tranquilly on the razorback reef of a tiny islet well off the beaten track of shipping.

"Let's see how you'll get her off," said Dick curtly. He felt none of the antagonism towards Ben that he would have felt earlier in the voyage; before June was picked up, for example. He only felt a lofty unbelief in the mate's ability to perform what seemed to be a miracle in his own eyes.

"If you hadn't put her aground, we'd have them rats by the whiskers," grumbled Ben, still peering into the darkness surrounding the ship.

"You can't worry them fellers now," put in Jed Roach glumly. "They don't care about no ship, or no fust mate. It's pearls and stuff they'll be——"

"Shut up, Jed!" snapped Dick. "Don't you get to thinking that way or you'll be as crazy as the rest of them. Pearls!"

"Have all those silly men gone ashore?" asked June. She suddenly laughed; but there was a note not all merriment in her laugh. It was dangerously near to tears. On the beach the grating of a keel could be heard, and voices, arguing. But the grate of keel was soon followed by the thud of oars.

"Go to your room, quick!" Dick told her, urging her towards the companionway. "They are coming back, June. They have all the guns, and this may be bad business. Lock your door. And don't forget about the harpoon if they get below."

She obeyed him, unwillingly. But Dick had little time for argument and was satisfied that she went. Ben and Jed ranged back and forth at the rail, watching the boat, and Ben gripped his old pistol as if he meant to throw it, lock, stock and barrel, at the first head he could make out. Jed, still grumbling to himself, took down a spare lance from the rack under the skids. Dick wanted something he could use more as he used his fists, and he wanted to use it on Yerner. But Ben gruffly told him to get a lance, like Jed, and he reached for one as Stoll's voice rolled out fatly from the boat.

What it was that Stoll said, or shouted, remained undistinguished, but it was something authoritative, clearly, because Hogg's angry voice answered it. Both were in the boat. Stoll was assuming command and Hogg was disputing his claim. Then words were heard. The boat stopped.

"You keep yer place as a fo'mast hand, Stoll!" bawled Hogg. "I'm running this boat."

"Like hell you are! You're one o' the gang because we let you in. Pull, fellers," Stoll retorted.

The oars dipped twice, then stopped again. Two men were fighting in the stern sheets. Dick jumped on the rail, ignoring Ben's authority in the excitement.

"Lay off, there!" he yelled. "Don't come any closer or we'll shoot!"

A laugh rang out. Somebody had knocked Hogg down with an oar loom, or boathook handle. The boat started again, and Stoll dared Dick to shoot.

"Where's your gun?" he jeered.

Ben's old gun exploded beside Dick's ear, and the mate fell from the rail to the deck with the shock of it. Ben was as surprised as anybody. He had fired involuntarily. But the shot had effect on the boat. It stopped again. Then Stoll's voice:

"Hold on! Hold on!" Men in the boat savagely accused each other of overlooking weapons aboard the ship. Stoll cried out: "No call for shooting, Dick. We want tools to dig with, and grub. And if the girl will tell us where to start in, we won't bother you."

"Dig with your hands, you poor nuts!" Dick retorted. Ben pulled him away from the rail to have his own say.

"Eat coconuts, same as the other monkeys!" said Ben. "When you're all ready to return to your duty, and get the ship afloat, mebbe I'll consider your surrender."

Out of the hubbub that arose in the boat, two stolen guns blazed. A bullet knocked Ben's gun from his hand and numbed his arm to the elbow. The other bullet creased Dick across the cheek, and involuntarily, as Ben had fired before, he hurled the lance in his hand. Sudden silence fell upon the boat. Then, after thirty seconds of stunned hush, clamor arose.

"You've killed Stoll! Take him aboard, Ben. He's bleeding awful!"

"I never hit anybody. It's a trick," Dick whispered in Ben's ear. Ben had that notion too.

"Bury him when you dig for that treasure," said Ben. "If you come nigher, somebody else'll git hurt!"

The lance came hurtling back, to stick

in the ship's side quivering. And curses came with it. A harpoon was snatched from the boat's bow and pitchpoled; only the warp stopped it and jerked it back to the sea. But the boat turned shoreward, and threats that burned the ears diminished with distance.

DAYLIGHT was graying the east then. As the light increased, the three men on the *Cuttyhunk's* deck could better see how the land lay. The ship had lightly grounded at the top of the tide. It was certain she must stay there until a full tide. But she lay easily, on the soft coral débris that would scarcely hurt her stout planking, though it might tear some copper. And she had found her way inside the reef, so that she lay sheltered from anything but a real twister. The island was two miles long, and less wide; a queer hump of a thing that might have been thrown up by a volcanic spasm. It was high, and a clump of wind burnt palms stuck out of the top of it like a cock's comb.

Abreast of the ship the boats lay on the beach. When the sun rose, men could be seen sprawled on the sand. Others were ranging the little island, back and forth, half-heartedly, as if daylight had put sense in their heads and the idiocy of their errand at last occurred to them. Something that looked manlike lay bundled in one boat. Two figures stood apart from the rest, talking. Dick got the telescope.

"Yerner and Hogg," he reported. "That's Stoll in the boat."

Ben leaned over the side, and yanked out the lance that still stuck there. Blood was on it.

"D' you suppose you killed him, Dick?" he muttered. For once there was no harshness in Ben's voice. He regarded Dick strangely. It was very like solicitude that shone in his sea sharpened old eyes. Dick stared shoreward. Fighting was one thing; killing was quite another matter in Dick's code. But he knew the shot that creased his face was meant to kill, and war was war, nasty though it prove.

"I hope not," he said. "If I did, I hope it was him who shot at me, that's all."

Killing a man with a whale lance was not soothing to the mind of a young fellow. There might be some feeling of justification, even pride, in returning a shot in the dark and scoring a hit. Many a pistol shot hits without killing. But the mere sight of that keen steel lance blooded to the shaft was creepy. It had palpably gone right through flesh, wherever it had struck. It seemed almost as gruesome as ax work.

"Forget it, lad," said Ben, quickly. "We'll see about starting somethin' right away. Them hellions won't leave us to ourselves long. Git thet gal out, and let her help Pluto git some breakfust for us. And don't you feel bad about heavin' thet lance. 'Tis her ought to feel bad, bringin' all this here hurroosh on the ship wi' her dumblasted fairy tales."

They ate on deck, June serving them in silence. The sun was warm, and the breeze tempered it. Small surf murmured on the outer reefs; the hardy foliage of the island rustled dryly. As they ate, they watched the shore, and the men. All were moving there. The bundle that was Stoll was moving up the beach between two men, staggeringly. Torn shirts were strapped about his right shoulder, and there was a stain at his back. The stain was grim enough; but Dick laughed loudly at the shape of it. He said it was the shape of the stain, but it was with relief that he laughed, did he but know it.

"Seems as if they wasn't right friendly," Jed remarked, noisily swallowing hot coffee.

Something was happening on the beach. Yerner and Blazes and Kopp faced half a dozen seamen headed by Hogg, and a fierce argument was afoot. All the men behind Hogg were of the older members of the crew; the last to fall for the mad notion of a treasure island. The argument was swiftly turned into action. Hogg swung a blow that dropped Yerner like a log. Kopp pulled out a gun and fired, it seemed pointblank, at Hogg. But Hogg was pivoting after his knockdown blow, and the bullet chugged into a boat gunwale. Blazes was hampered by a whale gun. He knew more about the pocket pistol of the gangster. The gun was in the way, and the seamen rushed him and Kopp and beat them down. It looked, to those watching from the ship, as if Hogg had persuaded the real seamen of their foolishness and had led them to a successful comeback.

"Soon have them aboard askin' fer to be taken back," Ben nodded. But they had presumed too much on a simple knock-out. Yerner came to, while the battle was on; he crawled clear, and when he rose he had a serviceable revolver in hand. And Yerner, a gangster and crook at heart, was a real gangster when his feet were on solid earth and his fist gripped a murderous weapon. He drove Hogg back, and got Blazes and Kopp to their feet. Men who had been otherwise occupied, running to watch the fight, now divided into two parties, siding with Yerner or Hogg. And the majority were with Yerner.

"Would you think men could be so childish?" cried June, angrily.

"Let 'em dig," said Dick. "Digging dust'll make 'em thirsty. Then they'll come to terms."

"Looks to me as if there's some sort o' pile o' rock thet ain't natural," remarked Ben, gazing through the telescope. "What d'you make of it, youngster?"

Dick took the glass. Two of the men were capering madly beside a cairn of white limestone. Their shouts could not be heard aboard the ship; but it was clear that they had made a discovery. Yerner and Hogg, antagonists a moment before, joined in the rush to the cairn. Yerner turned, and shook his fist at the ship; then thumbed his nose.

Ben, and Jed, and Dick slowly turned to regard each other. Then all turned their gaze upon June.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE CAIRN

JUNE returned their stares in blank innocence. Then, following their earlier shoreward scrutiny, or its direction, she saw the white cairn, and the quite obvious elation of the mutineers. She was not dull. On the contrary she was alert minded with more than average understanding of signs. Her dancing eyes flashed back and met Dick's, fixed in awful question upon her. She saw the grim challenge in Ben and Jed, too; but it was Dick she wanted to straighten out. She had heard almost every other man in the ship mouth imbecilities about that fanciful treasure island; Dick had never seemed quite so crazy. But here he was, as accusing as Ben or Jed, if eyes could accuse.

"I know!" she cried. "You think because those men have stumbled on a pile of stones, this is the treasure island, and I have been telling lies." A flash of anger warmed her for an instant; the next moment she was laughing, and it was clear, rippling, utterly amused girlish laugh, the first they had heard from the girl since she realized what her little romantic fiction might set afoot.

"Seein's believin', ain't it, missy?" Jed Roach blurted.

"They've sartinly found something," grumbled Ben.

"Suppose you come out with the whole truth, now," Dick said seriously. "It's a lot to believe, June, that we sailed west, as you said, and found this island, as you made believe we would at first, and that they have come across the sort of mark you read about in books, yet it's all in your head."

"I think you're all mad!" she cried, serious again, but only for a minute. She began to laugh, as merrily as before, until Dick said:

"Blood was shed last night over it. Captain Turk and five men are very likely lost because of it. There'll be a lot more blood spilled on this island before this ship gets away, if that thing over there is a treasure mark. Tell us the truth, June."

Then a new expression came into her face. Girlish anger, amusement, romantic ardor, these all passed as if she never knew their impulses. It was a look of sudden dignity, of something inherent in her, now for the first time challenged; the first stark realization that she was accused of lying. She had only been childishly annoyed when they questioned her tales at first. It was to be expected, if she wove romances about treasure islands. But now, after she had vowed to them that her tales were only stuff of dreams, they were calling her liar just because those silly men ashore had found some old stones set in a heap. Dick, too, who had seemed to understand her.

"I know no more about this accidental happening than you do," she replied simply. Then, before a hand could be lifted to stop her, the girl leaped to the rail, dived into the limpid sea with scarcely a ripple, and was swimming shoreward. Dick was on the rail ten seconds later; Ben Barrett caught his leg and halted him before he plunged.

"Belay that!" growled Ben. "Let's git

to rights about this afore we all goes dippy. What're they doin' ashore now, Jed. Ain't thet thar a water keg they're rollin' up to the stone heap?"

"Yes, and seems to me 'tis jest water they found. Likely marked by them rocks. A couple of fellers have killed some sort of animal, too. Pig, shouldn't wonder."

"Thet's enough to make 'em cocky. 'Twas grub they was uneasy about. Likely the gal told the truth after all."

"Yes, and there she goes, into that pack of alley rats, because we tried to make her out a liar!" growled Dick. "What're we going to do about it? Look! Yerner's seen her already. I'm going over."

"Better stand by the ship and do somethin' towards floatin' her," Ben retorted. "Soon's she's floatin', I can talk to them bozos. You watch me."

Jed Roach was inspecting a bundle of planks and ribs from an old stove boat that Chips had not got around to repairing. It was the only thing left to the ship resembling a boat; and they needed a boat worse than anything. Dick was sullenly gazing at the beach, feeling not a bit under the obligation of obeying Ben Barrett's orders. He was watching Yerner and some of the others there on the sand where June waded up from the sea all shining wet in the sunshine. So still was the air he could hear her clear voice speaking to them, though he could not hear the words. He heard the men's harsh voices, and Yerner's sharp reproof. He saw June and Yerner walk up to the cairn of stones, and Yerner made no attempt to offend the girl by touch or gesture. Ben understood what was in Dick's mind.

"Ain't no fear o' harm comin' to thet gal, sonny, as long as they thinks she kin tell anything about thet thar treasure. You turn to and lend a hand here. She's smart enough to keep clear o' harm, I'll bet; and if she ain't, we'll be a blasted sight better able to help her out if we have a boat under us. What's she look like, Jed? Pooty well busted, ~~ain't~~ she?"

They hauled down the broken planks. In the ship's stores were new planks and ready bent ribs, put aboard for replacements of such broken boats. At top of the tide, they had felt the ship move gently, as if she were held by the slightest margin. They might drag her afloat with the windlass if they could carry out an anchor. Then they would have the weather gage of the gang properly. But they must have a boat.

DICK went to work on the boat. From time to time he straightened his back and took a look at the island through the telescope. All the men were sitting around the gunwales of the boats. They were hungrily munching the hardtack from the boat's emergency rations. They had water now. How the whale boats' kegs had ever been allowed to remain empty was to be explained only by the slipshod conditions existing on the ship for a week past. But they had found water. And a fire burned cheerily just beyond the tide mark, all blue and gold and violet and green flames from brine pickled driftwood. A small pig roasted over it on a greenwood spit; and from time to time a man turned the meat. June sat there, among the men, and she was animatedly talking to Yerner and Hogg, who both seemed to listen tolerantly.

Old Pluto emerged from his galley. He had kept himself well out of sight. Now he had a cleaver stuck in his waistband, and carried a devilish French poultry knife of Turk's private belongings. To justify it before the three men on deck, the old darky carried a steel, too, and all the time he stood outside the galley he *cheewheeched* blade on steel. Instinct apparently overrode fear in Pluto. His broad nostrils quivered as his eyes wandered shoreward. He sniffed noisily.

"Bahbecue, ain't it, Mistah Ben? Seems lak ah smell hawg a-bakin'. Cain't be possum. Ma Lawd! Thar's Missy June 'mong dem rascals! Yo' all goin' git her? Heah, let me he'p wid dat boat."

Ben Barrett grunted, kicking a hammer over towards the ancient Doctor.

" 'Bout time," he growled. "The dam ship's at loose ends long enough. Git busy, ye old buzzard, and drive nails. There's work to do besides scallyhootin' after feather brained gals." Ben whacked home nails, a grunt for each nail. He was beginning to show the effects of all the recent upheaval. Never in thirty years of whaling had he experienced such a cruise. His ship on a reef, his crew playing hooky on a solitary island beach, his captain adrift with a whole boat's crew. And here was an old nigger cook, hiding in his galley for hours until now, appearing armed like a pirate to cooly sniff baked pig and to see nothing at all in the situation except that same baked pig and the silly girl who was responsible for it all. Ben was getting mad.

The boat was ready to launch when the tide had risen again to within a foot of high water.

"We'll go and get June, now," said Dick in the boat.

"You'll hop aboard here, lively, me son, and lend a hand with the kedge anchor!" Ben retorted. Jed Roach was already unstopping a coir hawser in the fore hatch, driving old Pluto grumbling before him. Ben was chief mate of the *Cuttyhunk* again. No doubt of that. He had no crew, to speak of; but such as he had he meant to put to work in his own way. Dick knew the tone and resented it at once. Somehow it recalled to him all the friction that had ever existed between him and Ben.

"You're talking big again!" he snapped. "Don't forget you were tied up in the blubber room until I let you loose. You don't run this ship any more, Barrett. I was in charge when she hit, and I can——"

"You—in—charge!" gasped Ben. "Why, consarn you for a young squirt! You're nothin' but a boy aboard here. Git you for'ard to thet kedge! Go on! Git a move on!"

Ben moved towards Dick, his eyes glittering, his knotty hands reaching. Dick gave no ground. He stood with a grin of cockiness on his face, willing, eager, to try out Ben again. And it was a different Dick to the lad who first crumpled under Ben Barrett's weird but effective deep water manhandling methods. Dick was twenty pounds heavier than when he was carried on board. He was as hard as hickory, and as lithe as whalebone. Full of cocky assurance, too, as a whale is full of grease.

"This is as good a time as any to settle the score," he said. "You go swallow the kedge. Now let's see what you've got."

Ben reached him with a rush. His great arms made that old circling movement aimed to grip Dick's waist; his scrubby grizzled head jutted forward to get leverage under Dick's chin. But Dick was wise to that trick now; wise, and strong enough to counter it if given as much warning as now. Dick felt the grip tauten at his waist; the hard old skull crunched up under his chin; but that was all. Before Ben could apply the power, Dick thrust hard with both fists, right where Ben's ribs met in front: jabbed with every ounce of sinewy young strength in him. Ben's grip slipped. Gasping, for a moment breathless, Ben staggered back; and as he fell away Dick swung a round-arm left that landed just wide of Ben's shapeless nose.

There was surprise in Ben's eyes. But Dick laughed. That ruined Ben's control. He looked as if he might be willing and glad to give Dick credit for having outgrown him; but that laugh was just like the one that had celebrated the breaking of his nose. He rushed again; and Dick discovered that an old warrior of Ben's experience must know more than one trick to survive as long as Ben had lasted.

Ben's two fists swung now, not as claws to grip, but as hammers to beat down. One of them knocked Dick's guard aside, numbing his arm like a blow on the funny-bone. The other almost missed, but not quite. It brushed off Dick's cheekbone, peeling the skin redly, and Dick went slithering across the deck until his back fetched up against the rail. Ben was on top of him as he bumped. Jed Roach and Pluto, still holding coils of the hawser, stood watching the fight indifferently. They waited for orders, and a fight more or less on a whaler's decks meant nothing to them. Once Ben had given them routine work to do, neither Jed Roach nor the ancient darky cook had a soul above the carrying out of it. But as Ben and Dick clashed again, something happened that shattered their indifference and stopped the fight in an instant.

A yell pealed over the water from the beach. Then shots, many curses, and June's clear, penetrating scream.

## CHAPTER XVII

### ON THE BEACH

THE gang had divided. The sand all about the boats was churned with scuffling feet. Hogg and the men who sided with him were trying to launch the boats, and in one of them Hogg stood shouting orders while trying at the same time to hold June, struggling like a cat in his arms. Yerner led the rest of the crazy mob in defense of the boats.

"Look! Hogg's trying to bring June aboard with the boats! We've got the Yerner bunch tarred if we help Hogg!" shouted Dick. For once Ben agreed with him.

"Come on, Jed!" he growled. "You stay aboard and keep ship, Doctor," he flung at the old negro. "Tumble in, Dick, my lad!"

Ben picked up his old pistol from the waterways where it lay since it had been shot from his hand, and dropped into the boat. Jed and Dick pulled until their muscles cracked. Their backs were towards the beach. Only Ben could see what was going on. Dick kept asking for details, wheezing the words through set teeth with laboring breath.

"G'wan, pull!" gritted Ben.

"Is Hogg making it?"

"Pull!"

Dick turned to look. Jed's oar thumped him between the shoulders and knocked the breath out of him. His oar caught a crab. Ben seized the loom below the handle, resumed the stroke, grabbed Dick's nearest hand and set it to the oar again.

"Pull, consarn you!"

A change swiftly upset the situation ashore. Yerner divided his own gang again. A concentrated attack drove the men from one boat—that furthest from Hogg and his backers—and Blazes jumped in with four rowers, shoving off in a fury of haste. Yerner yelled at them, and they pulled out for the ship. Then Ben Barrett caught the drift.

"Back water, Jed! Pull, Dick! Thet boat's goin' to take the ship. Pull, blast you!"

Ben swung on the steering oar. The boat turned in its length. Dick had a full view of the beach now; and he needed no more. He let go his oar, stood up, and dived overboard. He was halfway to the beach before Ben stopped cursing him. By that time the other boat was well on its way out. Ben and Jed took up the race, alone, and it seemed hopeless. Old Pluto peered over the rail, shook his cleaver at the mutineers' boat, but was all ready to surrender. Ben ceased rowing for an instant, took clumsy aim with his old pistol and fired twice at the other boat Then he began rowing again, leaving the result of his shots to Fate

Fate was kind to him. One bullet hit the stroke oar, knocking the rower backwards upsetting the rest; and the boat swung wildly. Ben and Jed spurted, and reached the ship's side before the other boat could get going. Then the ship was safe for the time; with Ben's gun, and Pluto's cleaver, and Jed's blubber spade showing above the rail. As Dick splashed up the shore Ben's harsh bellow could be plainly heard. It cursed Dick and all hands, the island and the boats impartially.

DICK landed in the midst of a litter of campfire and pig bones to find a regular state of siege. Hogg's followers, beaten from the boats, had gathered about the cairn of stones that marked the spring, the kindly thought of some bygone seaman who had found precious water and wanted other seamen to be able to find it. Yerner's gang stood undecided, between spring and shore. In a clump of wild plum bushes down to the eastward a small herd of fat wild pigs grunted uneasily. They also were part of an old seaman's kindly thoughts for posterity.

Dick's chief concern had been for June. He knew she had acted on impulse when she swam ashore to persuade these men of their foolish error. He had seen her in Hogg's arms, when Hogg seemed to be trying to carry her back to the ship. But now she was with Yerner's crowd; and Yerner's crowd were at odds with Hogg's adherents. Surprisingly, the girl seemed neither afraid or uneasy. She seemed at the moment to be more concerned about Stoll's injured shoulder than her own safety. Stoll was making the best of his chances, too. He grinned as Dick came up, not as badly hurt as had been supposed. Not much worse than Dick, with his creased face, though the lance had gone right through the flesh of his fat shoulder.

Dick was wary. Puzzled, too. Every now and then a shot was fired, by Yerner's crowd or the gang by the spring. The boat was back from the attempt to cut off the ship, and Blazes came yelling with his crew. Yet June seemed at ease. She even had a smile for Dick. And Dick was received with every appearance of good will. The whole thing was like a stage piece. If the shots that were fired had evil intent behind them, the marksmanship was very bad.

"Just the man I'm looking for," Yerner greeted Dick. "Let's forget bygones, Dick. June has convinced me that we've been a lot of brainless wonders. I stopped Mister Hogg carrying her off. He'd have tried to take the ship, and let her take her chance of a bullet with the rest, wouldn't he, June?"

"He told me he was going to ask Mister Barrett to take him and his men back, and we'd go back to my island home," the girl said. She was so completely a child, patting Stoll's fat shoulder as she finished bandaging him; so utterly without doubt that these men were speaking truth, just because they had let her persuade them, and had spoken of her home. Yerner was quick to prevent any chance of Dick pondering over the change.

"We just about got a hunch that we've pulled a boner," he said. "As the kid says, if we'd waited to think, we'd never have put stock in her fairy story. And Hogg made us see, and Stoll made it stronger, that what we've done amounts to mutiny on the high seas, and calls for jail, if not the rope. We ain't that bad, or that crazy, are we boys?"

Blazes and Kopp and half a dozen others lustily agreed. Stoll, smiling out of a fat face rather drained of blood, said ingratiatingly to Dick:

"You know me, Dick. You know my folks. Never a mutineer in five generations of 'em!"

Yerner went on, glancing furtively from face to face, looking sidelong out at the ship, again flinging a quick eye at the cairn at the spring. Hogg and his followers were not like belligerents, sitting there beside the white stones as if simply waiting for something to turn up. But if one of them moved much, it was from Yerner's camp the first shot came. It seemed to be replied to out of involuntary reaction.

"You're needed, Dick, whoever has the ship. You're the navigator. I've got Hogg tied. Our kegs are full of water, and the pigs are all on our end of the island. We've got the boats, too. All he's got is the spring, and we can get that if we want it. All these lads are sorry for their mad caper, and want to go aboard to their duty. So do I. We'll do our work and obey orders and trust to you and Mister Barrett to make it as easy for us as you can when we get home. June ought to go back to her island, too. You see how she is with us. Nobody'll harm her in this crowd. How about it?"

"You know us, Master Dick! Yer father knowed us, too. We may be foolish, but we ain't all bad. We was led adrift. We'll go whalin' ontil the ship's bung is full, if you'll speak a chance fer us." Some of the older hands hastened to let Dick know their minds. He believed them, but distrusted Yerner. He was not so sure about Hogg. Stoll was no good. Never would be any good.

"I'll see what Barrett says about it," he replied at length. "I'll talk to Hogg, too. If we get that ship afloat we need all hands. Besides, Yerner, no matter what Ben Barrett promises to do about you lunatics, there's still the matter of Captain Turk and his boat's crew. That's likely to be called murder. I'll do what I can, and let you know before dark. Come along, June."

Yerner and Stoll moved to place June between them. Each glared at the other, but both met Dick with the same smooth cunning.

"Let the little lady stay with us," Yerner suggested. "She'll be a sort of guarantee for us, you know, Dick. We savvy the sort of mess we're in, and you made it clearer talking about Turk. Damned if I hadn't forgot him."

"You want to stay with us, don't you, girlie?" Stoll purred, sliding his fleshy hand along her arm. June shrank from his touch; trouble darkened her eyes again. She half wistfully smiled at Dick, who was regarding her queerly. He was just getting the meaning of their apparent decency towards her. She had come ashore to show them their error, and they now held her as a hostage.

"I want to go to the ship," she said. "I want to go home."

"Come on, then," said Dick, and reached for her hand. Yerner interposed, still grinning smoothly, but unmistakably determined to hold on to his hostage.

"Nothing doing!" he snapped. "June's our ace in the hole."

"I won't go aboard without her," Dick retorted.

"Then you'll both stay ashore until I try my luck on the mate."

"We'll see!" Dick growled, and reached for June's hand again.

"Huh! Don't waste wind on the sucker!" snarled Blazes. "We can eat them three aboard." He thrust himself menacingly against Dick.

"Let go of her, Yerner," Dick warned, elbowing Blazes aside contemptuously. Yerner drew back, taking June with him, and Kopp stepped forward. Then Dick went mad. Yerner's grin had acted similarly before. Blazes struck at his head with a clubbed gun as Kopp came in range of his fist. Dick's hefty punch lifted Kopp from his feet and dropped him, and the effort carried Dick out from under Blazes' murderous blow. It carried him right in front of Yerner, to Yerner's utter surprise; and June twisted free just soon enough for Yerner to half guard his jaw from another of Dick's deadly right hooks.

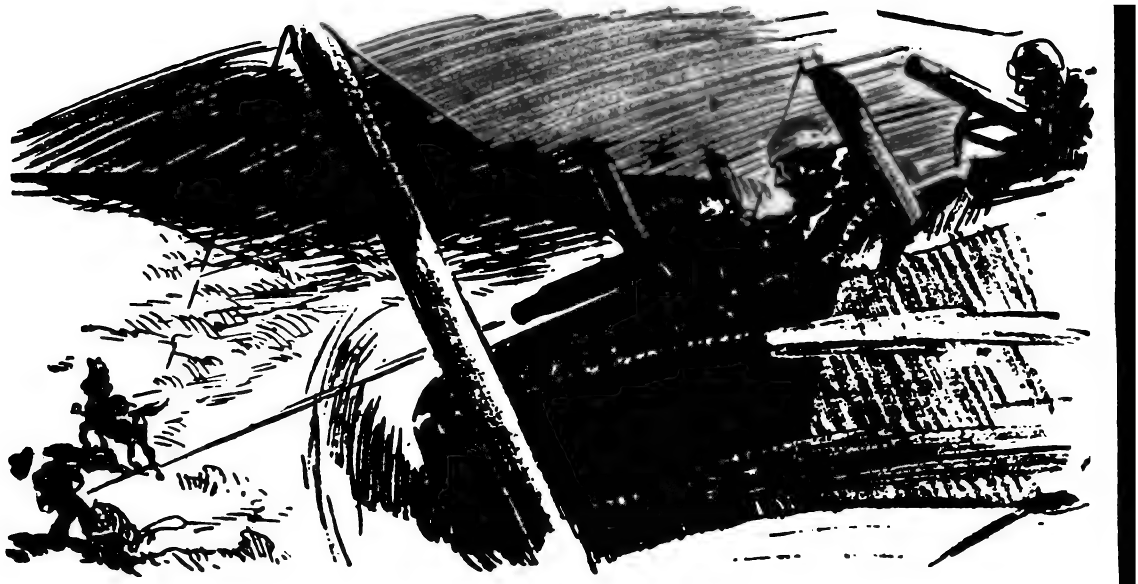
DICK had fought Yerner often before, as boy and growing youth. He had always whipped him. And now Dick had changed into a full man, while Yerner remained pretty much the same sort of rat he had always been. Dick's half stopped punch sent Yerner reeling. Another, swiftly following, brought Yerner's hands up before his face to guard. Then Dick went to work on his ribs, and hammered at them so fast that Yerner's breath was walloped into sobs, and Yerner's hands forgot defense and tried to drag out a gun from a pocket he could never reach because of those hammering fists.

Dick was happy in that moment. He knew Yerner was trying for his gun, and he took keen zest in the fact that he could hit hard and fast enough to render even a gun useless. Yerner had landed a punch or two himself, before going for the gun. Dick's bullet creased face, and the cheekbone scraped by old Ben Barrett, streamed blood. June, standing outside the crowd, her hands pressed together, nervously working, had her lips parted to cry out. Marvelously she found she did not want to cry out. Blood streaked Dick's face until he looked like a red demon. Yes. But he was laughing through the red. It was a real laugh. None of your rat grins of a desperate man.

The crowd acted queerly. Dick was thoroughly absorbed in the pleasant job of hammering Yerner; but he knew enough to expect the others to jump in and help their leader. That was why he kept stepping around Yerner like a cooper around a cask. But nobody walloped him from behind. Instead, some of the men appeared to be standing off others. Four men kept Kopp and Blazes away. Hogg and his men at the spring had stepped down to midway of the beach. There were no shots fired. Two bomb guns were among Yerner's crowd—murderous things capable of turning the tide of any gang fight. And they were in the hands of Kopp and Blazes, the very men to make use of them. Yet they were not discharged.

Other pistols were among the gang. Dick knew that. How many, he didn't know. All he knew was that Yerner was trying to pull one on him, and that one suddenly appeared. Dick floored his foe with what ought to have been the old K. O. Yerner was slipping when it landed and it only dazed him. But Dick stood back, and in an instant Yerner got his gun and fired from the sand.

*Tremendous was the effect of that shot on the desperate fortunes of the mutineers.. In the next issue, in one of the most dramatic chapters he ever wrote, Captain Dingle tells what followed on that far wild beach when the last stunning echo of the shot had died.*



*An Air Yarn of the Raiders of the Southwest*

# El JAGUAR'S CLAWS

### By RAOUL F. WHITFIELD

PAT JENNINGS laid down his three aces and reached for the silver. Not having done any pot-reaching for the past fifteen minutes, I swore cheerfully and reached for the palm leaf fan nearest my end of the table. Three handed poker was a rotten game, anyway. And it was hot. When it gets that way down in the Mexican Imperial Valley—it's *hot*.

"Next to Johnny Harmer, I'm ace high at this stuff," Pat muttered, grinning. "Now suppose we raise the limit and get this old game hot and——"

He stopped suggesting things. Ed Price swore grimly, and stared toward the door that led in from the ranch-house corral. I stared in the same direction. Juan had burst in through the door, his browned face twitching all over, his dark eyes staring. His lips moved; but no words came.

"What's doing?" Pat snapped the words. "What in hell's the matter with——"

"El Jaguar! He comes! From the north. Fast like——"

We didn't get the rest of it. The first part was enough. Juan had found the words, and they told us plenty. In the concession strip, running south of Tia Juana toward Ensenada, El Jaguar had a reputation. There was just one thing to do when the half-breed Mexican rode toward a ranch-house—and the three of us did it now.

Pat reached the rifle rack first and grabbed his favorite gun. Ed Price was right behind him. I had to get around the table, and before I'd reached the door things were commencing to pop. There was the crack of ancient Enfields, used by the rebel renegade and his band, the shrill yells of the chinks in the thatch roofed houses beyond the corral. At the door Pat turned and shouted to me.

"The hangar, Mac! If they get in there . . . ."

Then he was outside, with Ed Price's tall, lean figure right back of him. I stared at Juan. His eyes were still popping out of his small head, but he wasn't shaking so badly now.

"How many of them?" I snapped.

"A hundred," he panted. "Very many!"

I swore, and slid out through the door. If Juan said a hundred, that meant the renegade had a lot of men with him—maybe a dozen. And perhaps three of them could shoot straight. In any case, it wasn't much of a joke.

The first thing I saw, beyond the corral, was a figure sprawled face downward in the sand. The sharp crack of Pat's .38-30 sounded from my right. Two poorly mounted horsemen rode around the house into sight. One of them raised a queer looking rifle, and toppled off his pony as a crack sounded from my left. The other took a pot shot in my direction with a heavy appearing revolver. I went flat as the sand in the corral spurted about five feet to my right. When I got my rifle to a shoulder the horseman had wheeled around and vanished from sight. And Pat's voice came to me, grimly.

"Get over to the hangar, damn it! The greasers are ridin' wild over there."

I swore grimly and headed back into the dobe ranch-house. There was still considerable shooting but not as much yelling. Juan was ahead of me at the door which led from the side of the house toward the hangar. He had a rifle in his hands and he seemed to have recovered, at least to some extent.

The hangars were about a hundred yards from the corral at the side of the house. There were two of them. But Johnny Harmer, who owned the cotton ranch, had taken the little single-seater out of the small hangar for his trip up to Calexico. In the bigger hangar—the one Pat had called to me about—was a DeHaviland two-seater. And from what I could see as I ran, bent over, toward the corral fence, El Jaguar was wise to the fact that the ship was inside the hangar.

I pointed to a spot down the fence about twenty yards and muttered hoarsely to Juan. Pat and Ed Price were keeping up a steady fire on the other side of the house.

"Shoot to knock 'em cold, Juan. They play that way."

Then I let go at the first rider that got within range. I got him in the right shoulder. He yelled out, dropped his rifle and clutched at the wounded spot. Another rider came up close on a spotted pony. He was short and dark haired, raggedly dressed. A red band held the long hair back from his face, and I got a glimpse of a scar running across his yellow-brown forehead. He sat his pony pretty well and swung an automatic up for a shot at me.

"El Jaguar!" Juan screamed shrilly from his spot down the fence. I let the rifle crack, then dove to one side. But I didn't dive fast enough. There was a searing, stinging pain along the top of my head; the fence wood faded from my sight as a curtain of darkness closed in on me. My last thought, before I felt the dulled shock of my plunge to the sand, was that El Jaguar wasn't like most cholos. *He* could shoot, no doubt of that. It was an ironic thought.

THE first thing I heard was Pat's deep toned voice. He was swearing, and when Pat swore there was considerable color in his words. I struggled to sit up, shook off some of the dizziness that gripped me. Blinking a few times I commenced to get things straight. I was on the couch in the ranch-house living room. Pat and Juan were standing near by, looking down at me.

"How'd it—come out?" I managed to mumble, and lifted my left hand to bandages around my head.

Pat swore some more.

"You got creased by that runt of a renegade," he muttered disgustedly. "But that isn't all. They got Ed Price!"

That jolted me out of the dizziness that remained, even if it didn't stop the ache across the top of my head.

"Got him?" I muttered. "You mean—Ed's dead?"

"Hell no!" Pat was cleaning the barrel of his pet rifle. "They closed in on us. About five of 'em. Ed went down from a butt wallop, an' the next thing I knew two of the breeds were dragging him out of the corral and using his body pretty well as a shield. Four of 'em rode off, with the runt they call El Jaguar covering the retreat."

I swore grimly.

"Retreat hell!" I breathed, and wabbled to my feet. "That's what they came for—to get one of us. And they did it!"

Pat grunted.

"Johnny'll raise ten kinds of the devil," he muttered. "He's due back in an hour or so."

I groaned.

"How about the D. H.?" I asked slowly, and I saw by the expression in Pat's eyes that he'd been figuring I'd ask that one.

"She's got plenty of holes in her," he stated. "I got over there right away. She's leaking gas, but she didn't burn up. Hell! This runt's a wise guy."

I nodded.

"Which way did they ride off, Pat?" I asked slowly. "West?"

"Cocopah way," Pat replied. "There'll be a moon."

That told me a lot. It meant that El Jaguar figured on getting into the eastern slopes of the Cocopahs before the pursuit was hot. And there were other things it suggested. With a few hundred cholos, chinks and breeds working on the cotton crop, there were bound to be bad ones. And the scar faced leader of the outlaw attacking band had known a lot of facts that he shouldnt have known. The location of the D. H., for example. And ten to one he'd known damn well that Johny Harmer was up north.

"How long," I asked shakily, "was I out?"

Pat shook his head.

"Not long," he returned grimly. "Everything went fast. And Juan came around yelling that this animal-named breed had killed you. I'd just tried to hit the cholos who were taking Ed away—without hitting him—and I went around and dragged you in. Pedro's checking up on the damage . . . Juan, hand me that gun over there."

Pat pointed toward the rack, and Juan stirred himself. He was still pretty scared. But then, El Jaguar was more than a tradition along the concession strip. He was a swooping, daring raider who killed, stole and burned. The Mexican Federal Government had a price on his head, but there were few efforts made to catch the man. And the Government wasn't worrying much about protecting the concession holders—certainly not the *Yanqui* concession holders. They were gringo breed of the most cheerfully hated type.

"I'll look at the ship," I muttered and moved toward the door. I felt pretty weak and shaky, but the plane meant a lot to us, right then. "May be able to patch her up."

Pat grunted. He followed me out and toward the hangar. The workers who came into the ranch-house section of the plantation were gathered in groups near the dobe house; they chattered in subdued tones. Pat called out to several of the minor overseers and gave them instructions. I went toward the hangar. It was a canvas one and offered a ship no protection from the bullets. I touched the bandages around my head gingerly. Doc Connors would ride in soon; he was out treating one of the workers about four miles to the south. I'd been pretty lucky, at that.

It took me ten minutes to discover that I could have the ship ready for the air in an hour. And there would be a moon. El Jaguar was a shrewd devil. Six months ago he'd taken a fat chink from the foreign melon plantation twenty miles to the north. The chink had been a blood brother of the owner. And it was rumored that the bandit leader had got his five thousand ransom money. The chink had died two weeks after he had wandered back to the ranch-house. He had been too fat to stand the rough treatment accorded him.

I started working on the ship, resting every few minutes. Two control wires had been shot away. The tank would give me the most trouble, but it could be fixed. Ed Price wasn't fat—and he was tough. Also, he was a fighter. Johnny Harmer would be in with the single-seater within an hour, unless something went wrong. That would give us two ships. But El Jaguar would have a lead of more than an hour. And in that time he could come very close to getting into the slopes of the Cocopahs. Once in there, his band would be hard to find. And again, if the pursuit got too hot, what would happen to Ed Price? The breed leader was ruthless. There was no disputing that fact.

I was starting to work on the tank when Doc Connors and Pat came in. Pat was swearing, as usual. The doc sat me down on an oil can and looked over the furrow on top of my head.

"Half inch more and you'd be in a hotter place than Imperial Valley, Mac," he muttered.

I nodded. Pat told me that we had two chinks and one cholo dead, with three wounded. El Jaguar had left three of his men behind; two of them dead.

"Just like the Marne," I muttered. "Johnny'll be sore as hell that he missed it."

Pat Jennings narrowed his dark eyes. He's taller than I am, and heavier. Johnny Harmer brought him down from around Bakersfield to watch things while he was away on business trips. This was Johnny's first trip away; and Pat felt pretty badly, I could see that.

"Johnny'll be in on the next one!" Pat stated grimly. "How about Mac, Doc? Can he go out with us?"

I grunted. The doc grinned and shrugged his shoulders.

"He's not sick enough for *me* to try and stop him, Pat," he replied slowly, which was one of the most sensible things the medico ever said.

I went back to work on the DeHaviland after the doc got through with my head and made me drink some stuff that didn't have a bad effect. Pat went into the ranch-house to get the guns right and to give orders about watching the ranch while we were away. The doc would stick, and Pat had sent over to Al Cummings, on the next ranch, for help.

There was just one thing that puzzled me. And that was why the runt bandit leader had tackled our place. The red-headed Johnny Harmer had a nasty reputation for fighting, in the concession strip. There were easier concessions to tackle. And Ed Price was only a hired hand. Not that Johnny wouldn't fight for him. He would. But how the devil did El Jaguar know that much? Or had he figured that with Johnny away he could get in on the ranch-house and clean up? Like most of the concession holders we kept little coin about. That was the idea of the ships; to fly the pay roll down from San Diego. And what little we did have on the concession was safely cached. The workers knew nothing about it.

It looked to me as though El Jaguar had been hungry, and greedy. He'd just clawed out. And his claws were sharp. I went after a soldering iron for the tank. The runt breed had claws, and we had wings. It looked like a finish scrap. The odds? From where I was standing it looked pretty even.

JOHNNY HARMER listened to Pat Jennings with tight lips and narrowed eyes. His head moved up and down at intervals. On occasion I put in a word or two. Doc Connors walked up and down and smoked one pill after another. Juan stood near the ranch-house door, his beady eyes wide. Pat finished, and Johnny got to his feet from the edge of the crude chair upon which he had been seated.

"The killer's got an hour and fifteen minutes on us," he stated grimly. "There'll be a three-quarter moon in another hour, high enough to give us plenty of light. If El Jaguar is very wise, we won't find him. There are gullies in the mountains that could hide a small army. But—" Johnny smiled grimly—"he may not be very wise. And there's Ed. He may be able to do something. But get this: We don't rush in and have them slit Ed's throat or fill him with lead. We play it easy. I'd sit tight and wait for this breed's terms—only he rates going out. He's messed up in the concession strip too much. Someone's got to finish him off."

I nodded. Pat swore softly. Johnny's eyes met mine.

"The D. H. is right for the air, Mac?" he questioned.

"That's my guess," I stated. "Not saying she'll stand much stunting, though."

The boss grunted.

"Won't have to," he snapped. "I'll fly west from here, to the mountains. You flying northwest. About fifteen miles between us, there'll be. Take some flares. If you locate 'em, fly away as if you'd never seen 'em. Then shoot off a flare. I'll come over and we'll see how we can work it—without getting Ed finished off. I'll work my end the same way. Pat can ride in the rear cockpit with you. Take rifles and a couple of Colt's, and plenty of ammunition for the Lewis guns. We'll get off in ten minutes."

Pat and I nodded. Johnny was telling the doc about two men who were coming over from the Cummings' concession. That would leave three white men and the workers to watch the ranch-house.

"Johnny, why in hell did they come in here and take Ed?" I asked when the boss had finished talking to the doc. "Funny game, isn't it?"

Johnny Harmer swore.

"A year ago I killed a greaser over near Black Butte," he said slowly. "Went over to get a weakling I had down here out of a gambling house on that hell hill. The greaser's joint was run by a chink. And the greaser didn't want me to take out my man. We argued. And my gun was better than his dirk. His name was Hajos and he had a twin brother scrapping around Mexico City. The brother was called El Jaguar. Does that help any?"

I stared at Johnny, then swore softly. It was easy to picture the scar faced runt waiting. A bit afraid, perhaps, but waiting for the chance to strike at Johnny Harmer. Hungry? El Jaguar was more than that. But he was careful, too. And that made it worse.

"That's why we go slow." Johnny's voice was hard. "We'll never get Ed out alive if we don't go slow. And we'll never get him out if we don't fight for him. The killer don't play even close to fair. He claws, and runs!"

"Someone on the inside put him wise—this El Jaguar," I stated. "He struck at just the right time, and only Juan gave us warning of his coming. He knew you had a ship up, Johnny, and he knew we had one in the hangar."

Johnny Harmer smiled grimly and pursed his lips

"Maybe he'll know we have two ships up this time!" he muttered. "Let's get going."

We went toward the hangar. Johnny's little single-seater was outside the corral, ready for the air. Juan stood near the tail assembly; he came toward us as we approached the ship. I was slipping into the harness of my Irving pack 'chute; Pat and Johnny were adjusting their helmets. The moon was just getting up; it would be very light soon.

"He is bad—very bad man!" Juan spoke shakily. "He do always the same thing—kill!"

Johnny grunted.

"If he does Ed Price in," he breathed in a harsh voice, "I'll chase him all over Mexico until I get him!"

And Johnny didn't talk idly. Pat shook his head slowly as we went to the DeHaviland in the hangar. My head still ached dully. I had to go easy in pulling my leather helmet over the bandaged spot. I wouldn't forget that crease. It was something *I* owed El Jaguar, too.

I climbed into the front cockpit of the ship. She was well equipped, the D. H., even if she were a war type plane. Two Lewis machine guns, mounted to shoot between the whirling blades of the propeller, synchronized perfectly, even if I had done the job myself. And another Lewis was mounted on a swivel bracket in the rear cockpit.

I snapped the self-starter switch. She rumbled through the exhausts. Reeving her up a bit, I jerked my head sideways. Pat was getting into his 'chute harness. As I throttled down, the higher pitched roar of the single-seater's radial engine came to my ears. I yelled for Juan to jerk the wheel blocks away. Then I taxied out of the hangar.

There was little breeze. As we rolled up near the single-seater, Johnny waved a hand. Pat came out and climbed into the rear cockpit. Doc Connors waved us off, and I let Johnny get into the air first. He zoomed almost off the sand and headed west of the workers' shacks. We got off well, and I banked the D. H. in a northwesterly direction. The moon was up just high enough to make everything that familiar, gray color—sand, yucca, mesquite. Off to the east was the black American Waterways irrigation ditch, the system that had made the Valley pay big. That is, had made it pay big in melons and cotton—for a fighting man. Off to the west were the rises and slopes of the Cocopah Mountains, running north and south not far from the Pacific. They loomed darkly against the horizon toward which I pointed and held the nose of the ship.

AT FOUR thousand we flew level. Air speed, seventy-four an hour. Oil and water right. Just a mild head wind holding our speed down a little. Almost a perfect night for flying. We had flying lights, but we kept them off. For the first five minutes I could detect the shape of the single-seater, headed almost directly west, and then I lost her. Looking over the side of the fuselage I saw that the exhaust pipes were already streaming out a thin line of red. The chances of getting in on El Jaguar without being seen would be slim. But maybe we could trick him.

*Maybe.* It wasn't exactly a cheerful thought. If it hadn't been that they'd got Ed, things would have been simplified. There was a chill in the air already; in a few hours more it would be cold. Up in the slopes of the Cocopahs it would be colder. I had a hunch that El Jaguar would figure he'd put the ship out of commission, and show a fire. The average cholo likes to keep warm. We could spot a fire a long way off, from four thousand feet.

I kept a sharp lookout for a rising line of smoke, a touch of red. Nothing doing. We roared toward the first slopes of the mountains, with not a sign of the bandit outfit. Below us the level surface of the Valley showed silver white. The concession land didn't extend over this far west. Mesquite clumps were thicker; there were no huts of the workers to be seen.

For ten minutes we flew on, and then we were over the mountain slopes, the rises on the east side. There was little foliage here. The watershed was on the Pacific side; over there everything was rich and green. The only Valley water came from the irrigation ditch, came down from across the line.

There wasn't any chance that the bandit outfit had got across the range. It took tough riding to get across, and their ponies, none too good, were sure to be tired. I banked the plane to the left, to the south. Johnny would bank to the north, and we'd meet somewhere along the line. Staring over the side of the fuselage I watched the patches of mesquite below, the changing color of the earth. No sign of El Jaguar. Not a flash of red in sight.

Then Pat pounded on the fuselage side, and I jerked my head. He pointed off to the southeast. There, higher in the sky than our plane, was a flare! It was dropping down toward the Valley stretch, a flare of yellow-white in the black desert night. The signal for help!

I banked the ship to the left and roared her through the sky toward that flare. Distance? Hard to figure in atmosphere as clear as the Valley's. About five miles, I guessed. There was no sight of the single-seater. But then, if she were holding altitude, staying above the flare, she wouldn't show. And if Johnny had spotted El Jaguar he'd stay above the flare.

I swore softly. That part of it was all right. But the runt leader had eyes; he'd see the flare, too. And Ed was down below. That was the thing that hurt.

The exhausts were shooting back streams of red fire now, with the engine warmed up nicely. She was hitting it off great, winging through the air wide open. I pulled back a little on the stick, let her climb and lose speed. Didn't want to lose speed, but I had to get altitude.

THE light of the flare was weaker. It died as I watched it. But I had the direction. A few more miles and I'd pick up the shape of the single-seater. I sat stiffly in the cramped quarters of the front cockpit. Just once did I turn my head. Pat had the bracketed Lewis ready for action, but his helmeted head was low, out of the prop wash breeze.

We roared on. And I commenced to get worried. There was no sight of the single-seater. It was a cinch that we were very close to the spot where the flare had dropped. I searched the sky carefully, then nosed the D. H. down with the engine wide open. Nothing below but the silver-gray floor of the Valley; nothing in the sky. And yet, something had been there, minutes ago. I jerked my head, shouted at Pat:

"See her?"

Pat shook his head. He was up now, looking over the side. The moon was flooding the Valley with light. We could see for miles in all directions. And then, suddenly, she came!

Down from above, diving almost straight at us! I got a flashing glimpse of her, zoomed the D. H., heard Pat cry out hoarsely. My eyes widened as the zoom of the plane gave me another glance. It *wasn't* Pat's single-seater! Another ship!

Then red streaked down from her cowling. There was the clatter, staccato and menacing in tone, of machine gun fire! I kicked the left rudder and shoved the stick forward. The DeHaviland went over in a slow spin. For a split second I thought we'd crash. Then the shape curved off to the south, zoomed again. I got the controls in neutral, leveled the D. H. off, zoomed her.

Jerking my head I saw that Pat was leaning forward. His lips were pressed tightly together; his face was blanched and drawn.

"Not hit," he shouted against the zoom-pull of the engine. "Get him, Mac."

I faced front again, and we fought it out for altitude. And as we climbed I had time to look her over. She was old; looked like a Standard or a Jenny. We were outclimbing her. As far as I could see, there was no one in the rear cockpit of the other plane, and yet she was a two-seater. And her pilot had come pretty close to finishing us with his first burst.

She banked in toward us. We had a hundred feet of altitude, and I nosed the D. H. down and at her. I'd get a burst in and then leave her to Pat. A hand gripped my shoulder. Pat was pointing downward to the mesquite and sand.

I got one glimpse of a small ship motionless on the earth, and then, as the two-seater tried to slip away, I squeezed the stick trigger of the left hand gun. She crackled, and then jammed! The two-seater was diving. I dove after her. My glance downward had been just enough to throw my eyes off the ring sights.

Pat shouted something, and I leveled the D. H. off, twisted my head back and tried to see above the ship. I had a stabbing fear that there was another plane above us. It was hard to tell just what we'd flown into.

But there was no ship above, and I nosed the D. H. over again. Then I got another surprise. The two-seater that had slipped away from us was diving straight down at the single-seater!

We screamed down after her. I got a glimpse of a figure running from the tail assembly of the plane on the sand—Johnny Harmer! Then the gun of the plane below us stabbed red into the air, and the ship leveled off just over the single-seater. And for the second time in seconds I pulled a boner.

As the two-seater leveled off she came in range. We were right on her. And I forgot about the left gun having jammed, and squeezed that trigger again. Nothing happened. I swore, squeezed the right stick trigger and jerked back on the stick. The other plane zoomed, and we missed the upper wing surfaces of the single-seater by inches.

"Steady," I muttered to myself. "Come out of it."

We zoomed up after the other two-seater, and this time I used my head, as well as my fingers. I got in a long burst, saw the yellow tracer bullet stream batter into the tail assembly above. Then I banked off and got well clear of his crash. And he *crashed!*

The ship came down in a vertical side slip. I was gliding for a spot near the single-seater when she hit, and headed toward her. We touched sand in a fair three point landing, and I skidded her around so that Pat had her in range of his machine gun.

Johnny was running up. He was pointing off toward the mountains, almost directly to the west.

"Ed Price. Riding that way. Spotted horse," he shouted up at me. "Two of the band after him."

"I'll fly over. Stop 'em from catching up with him," I interrupted. "You watch this——"

"Nothing doing!" Johnny snapped the words. He was up on the wing step now. "The rest of the bunch headed the other way when they spotted me. Back toward the ranch-house!"

I stared at him. Pat gripped my arm, pointed toward the wreckage of the other plane. A figure was crawling crabwise away from it.

"Get him, Pat!" Johnny gave the order. "Watch for a gun!"

Pat slid over the side, Colt's in his right hand. Johnny talked to me in a harsh tone.

"Ed's got free and he's riding for the mountains. El Jaguar's heading back toward the ranch-house. Got about fifteen men with him, most of 'em armed. My engine went dead—just after I let loose the flare. This other ship came from the west—one of the band, of course. El Jaguar's out for a killing. And there's only three scrappers at the house!"

I groaned. Pat was bending over the figure of the one who had crawled away from the wrecked two-seater. He waved a hand. Johnny spoke again.

"You and Pat fly back. Stop the others. If you can't stop 'em, get back and wait for 'em. I'll fix up my break in the feed-line and go after Ed. I'll get back as soon as I can."

I nodded. Johnny dropped down off the wing step, trotted toward Pat and the motionless figure beside him. Cool? Johnny was always that way when things got tough. But I was a bit shaky. Fifteen men riding on the ranch-house, all armed! And El Jaguar, for one, could shoot. I had reason to know that.

Pat came running back and climbed up into the rear cockpit. He leaned toward me. I was working on the jammed machine gun.

"It's that renegade, Brock. The runt must have hired him up north. He's badly smashed up. Johnny says to sky ride for home."

I nodded.

"Gun set for action?" I snapped at Pat.

"Hell, yes!" he swore. "How about a shot at something?"

I got the circular magazine freed from the jam. Twisting my head, I advanced the throttle and shouted at Pat.

"*A* shot? Where you're going you'll get plenty!"

Then we roared off the sand and into the air, clipping a clump of mesquite with the undergear. I had a last look down at Johnny Harmer, bending over the motionless form of Brock, the renegade, and after that I was busy getting everything out of the DeHaviland that could be gotten. We sky streaked, three hundred feet off the Valley floor, toward the ranch-house and El Jaguar.

IT TOOK us just five minutes and some odd seconds to sight El Jaguar and his outfit. They were riding for the ranch-house, and riding hard. As we got in close I tried to count them. Three were straggling behind on lean horses. Ten rode in a bunch. I swore softly, thinking of Doc Connors and the two men from Al Cummings' ranch. If anything happened to us, if we didn't stop them, there would be a slaughter at the dobe house.

They heard us roaring up, of course. I nosed the D. H. down, got a sight on the sand and mesquite just ahead of the three stragglers and squeezed the left-hand machine gun. Stop them? Two of the cholos got off their horses so quick I thought they'd been hit. But they weren't. They ran to one side, crouched low. The third rider wheeled his horse and headed back toward the mountains. I leveled the D. H. off—winged toward the main group ahead. Ahead? Not now.

They were splitting up. El Jaguar knew something of tactics. Three groups rode in three different directions. But they had no cover. The mesquite was low, the moonlight bright. I smiled unpleasantly and dove toward the group in which was loping the spotted pony of the short, scar faced leader. It wouldn't take much to disorganize the band. And El Jaguar rated a spill of lead —the same dose he'd administered many a time.

I didn't lead the spotted pony much, but I led him too much. The stream of bullets found no mark. I banked the ship around, wing to the mesquite, wing to the stars. Pat's gun crackled sharply. As I leveled off I saw that two riders lay on the sand, one horse was down, motionless. But El Jaguar was riding hard, back toward the single-seater.

There was a decision to be made. I looked the Valley surface over. Two groups were riding toward the ranch-house again in a converging line. But El Jaguar was not with them. *He* rode toward the mountains!

"He's quit," Pat shouted hoarsely, but I shook my head.

"Quit hell!" I shouted back. "He's after Johnny."

We circled in the sky. Almost a dozen cholos riding toward the dobe ranch-house; and El Jaguar riding back toward the man who had shot down his brother. Claws? I was willing to admit that the runt leader was using them. He had a pony and Johnny Harmer had only a motionless ship. The chances were that he hadn't patched up the feedline break, and that meant that his machine gun, mounted on the single-seater's cowling, was useless. On the earth the ship had an angle slant that tilted the gun toward the sky.

He had a rifle; but so did El Jaguar. And the leader could ride in on that pony, circle the single-seater and . . .

I didn't like to figure Johnny's chances against the bandit chief. Johnny was better with a six-gun or an automatic than with a rifle. And El Jaguar would be a fast moving object, even if his pony were tired. A hit in the gasoline tank of the ship. . . .

My fingers tightened on the stick. I got her around and headed after the runt leader. I could hear Pat protesting. The other bandits were not so far from the ranch-house. Ten minutes' ride would get them in. But I wanted El Jaguar. The dull ache in my head increased my desire to get the runt, and get him good.

He heard us coming, and I guess it gave him a surprise. He'd figured we'd follow the others and try to break them up. Pulling up sharply, he slid off his pony as I dove the plane. My first burst missed him by twenty yards. Ground strafing? It isn't easy. Not from an object moving almost a hundred an hour, and in a dive.

As I banked around I heard the clatter of Pat's gun again. Then I picked up El Jaguar. He was squatted on the sand near a clump of mesquite, his rifle slanting up at us. It was almost funny—almost, but not quite.

We dove again, pulled up level for a fraction, then dove. I squeezed the stick triggers of both guns. The squatted form of El Jaguar was in the ring sight. My lips moved as a double stream of lead crashed downward.

"Finish—El Jaguar."

I pulled back on the stick. The plane's nose came up. We were close to the mesquite. I got her into a shallow bank and then, suddenly, I felt the uselessness of the stick. Only twice before have I had that feeling. No pull on the controls, something broken, finished.

Instinctively I cut the engine switch. We were thirty feet, perhaps, above the Valley surface. Our left wing was down. I tugged desperately to get it up again. And with the stick jammed all the way to the right—there was a faint pull—the wing came up. And then the stick wabbled uselessly in my grip.

The plane was losing flying speed. Her nose started to drop. I jerked my head, shouted wildly at Pat, who was up in the rear cockpit.

"Out of control—crash!"

Then we hit. Both tires blew with reports like rifle cracks. The plane leaped up into the air again, nose slanting upward. I threw my arms before my face for the second crash. It came as the ship dropped almost like an elevator, the weight of the engine pulling it down faster than the tail assembly. We struck with a grinding, ripping crash, in a pancake fall.

My head got it again, against the instrument board. I tried to shake off the effects of the rap, tried to make numb fingers snap loose the safety belt buckle. It seemed to me that I heard Pat's voice, heard the crack of his Lewis. I got the buckle snapped loose and got to my feet.

There wasn't much room in the cockpit, and there were strange sounds all around. The ship wasn't burning; my cutting of the switch had prevented fire. I steadied myself and stared out into the white moonlight. And then I saw what it was all about. Around us, riding in a narrowing circle, were the riders of El Jaguar's band. The little snapping sounds I heard were made by lead battering into the ship, spurting wood from struts, striking metallic parts of the engine.

I got my Colt's out of the holster. Two figures rode past on the right; there was the steady clatter of Pat's machine gun. One horse went down; the other rider pitched from the saddle. I faced the other side and squeezed the trigger of the Colt's as a rider came in close. But I missed, and wood leaped from a strut near my head as the cholo fired from his saddle.

Right then I got the idea that El Jaguar had come for a real killing. No ordinary Mexicans were these men. They rode too well, shot too well. And they were closing in on us.

I turned toward Pat, whose gun was now silent. He raised his head and faced me. There was a grim expression in his narrowed eyes. I wiped a streak of red from my face with the back of my hand

"Done," Pat muttered. "Lewis jammed."

Two bullets rang into the engine hood; another ripped through the fabric between Pat and myself. I swore harshly.

"The runt—did it," I breathed. "With a rifle."

Pat nodded his head. He swayed suddenly, gripping his right arm near the shoulder. The rifles of the riding men were making sharp cracks all around us. And they were just out of range of my Colt's. I groaned. A fine finish!

Then we both heard it: the droaning roar of a ship's engine. Johnny Harmer in the single-seater! In the air; coming down at us. Already the riders were scattering. The clatter of Johnny's machine gun was steady as he dove in. Pat Jennings laughed mirthlessly. My legs suddenly gave and I slumped down into the cushioned cockpit. I didn't go out; but about the only thing of which I was conscious was the roar of the single-seater's engine and the *rat-tat-tat!* steam-rivet chatter of a Lewis gun in action.

JOHNNY HARMER shook his head slowly. We were back in the ranch-house. Juan was serving us coffee and it was almost dawn. Doc Connors had put some more bandages on my head and had taken three bullets out of Pat's body. But Pat was tough; he might have taken three more and still listened in on Johnny's words. Ed Price, smiling grimly, rolled a pill. His face was discolored; there were cuts over his eyes.

"El Jaguar wanted me," Johnny stated. "But first he wanted to get one of you fellows, figuring that would draw me out in a chase. He had the best men he could get from the north; and he'd waited a long time, so Manuel says. This Manuel was his servant and he knew the runt's plans.

They got Ed and rode out toward the Cocopahs. But they rode slowly. And they were a bit careless with Ed, after they'd handled him roughly, and he'd faked being hurt worse than he was. He got a pony and rode for it.

"Just then I flew along and spotted things. El Jaguar headed for the ranch, to make things hot back there. He thought we'd come out on the ground. The planes fooled him. Then you went after him, Mac, and he split up his band. You thought he knew I was down. Manuel says he didn't. He was trying to get clear. When Manuel, who was riding with the ones heading for the ranch-house, saw you fly back after his chief, he swung the others around and they rode back to try and save him."

Johnny paused to light a pill. Then he continued:

"El Jaguar was game, I'll say that much. He brought you down with a rifle shot, just before you riddled him with Lewis bullets. I'd chased the two cholos off—the ones who were riding after Ed. And I'd seen him turn back. So I flew after you, and when I came up, the band led by Manuel were giving you hell. But they didn't like the stuff I turned loose. I got a few; the rest scattered. Manuel's in bad shape but he may pull through. They took a licking, those cholos. They'll keep clear of the concession strip, believe me!"

Ed Price grunted.

"Sure they will!" he stated sarcastically. "Until another leader comes along."

I shook my head.

"Won't be soon," I stated weakly. "They don't all have claws like El Jaguar."

Johnny Harmer drew a deep breath. He ran an oil stained hand over his red hair. When he spoke there was biting humor in his voice.

"Below the Border," he said slowly, "you expect anything. And sometimes—" he grinned at me—"you get it!"

# DEVILSTONE

## *The Tale of an Ancient Terror*

### By AUBREY FEIST

THE world has forgotten the Thurstun Thursdays; it has almost forgotten Thurstun. By the "world," of course, I mean the world of cities. The country people will never forget.

Thurstun, like every other place, has had its little hour. Questions were asked in the House of Commons; articles bristled with capital "T's," and an artist who ventured a "not on Thursday" was hissed off the boards of the Orpheum.

Then, of a sudden, the bubble burst. The murders ceased and Thurstun found peace. Its Thursdays became as other Thursdays and the world passed on to a new sensation.

It is only in old newspapers that we can still find an echo of the tragedy. I have a pile before me now and the headlines alone are grim enough reading:-

Thurstun Ripper At Work Again

Two Men Found Dead In Thurstun Woods

Old Woman Murdered

Let me quote from the *Daily Gazette* of Friday, the 19th of November.

> . . . And the murderer is still at large. Late last night, two local residents, Mr. and Mrs. Roland Wells, were found dead in the woods about half a mile from their home. There was no apparent motive for the crime which appears to be the work of the lunatic who has been terrorizing the district for several months. The fact that the recent crimes have all been committed on a Thursday has given rise to considerable speculation, and many assert that the murderer is the mysterious sheep stealer who, some weeks ago, made havoc among the flocks.
>
> Dr. Edward Crumlin, the local practitioner, informed our representative that there have been similar outrages in the past; but his evidence, though interesting to the historian, is not likely to be of much use to the police in their investigations.
>
> At a time like this wild theories are bound to arise. The villagers themselves declare that they are haunted by the devil and point to an ancient monument which is known as Devilstone . . .

But why go on? This is but one of a hundred similar articles, and the only reason for my having chosen it is that Mr. and Mrs. Roland Wells were my only surviving grandparents. Now they were dead, brutally murdered, and the Thurstun Ripper was still at large. I saw my duty very clearly; but the police had failed, and it was more to satisfy my bereaved mother, than from any real hope of success, that I left London late one Thursday morning and motored down to Thurstun in the heart of the Sussex weald.

My road lay south through Tunbridge Wells till I mounted the heights of Hackhurst Beacon and halted my car on the summit. The afternoon was cold and dreary, even for November. The sky was the color of burnished copper and, far away, the gray storm clouds were creeping up from the sea. Before me lay the rolling weald, mile after mile of sodden bracken, with just enough of the woodlands left to tell of that vast forest which, in the Middle Ages, covered nearly all the country that lay between the North and the South Downs.

The wind was blowing in short, heavy gusts as I slid down the long straight road to Peasefield, where the tree country begins. By Abbot's Mill, I turned to the left, down a stony track which coiled like a snake round the base of a bare, brown hill. Down I went into the darkness, down and down through wooded banks till the great trees linked gaunt arms above me and I saw the bright vane of Peasefield church glimmering far above my head like a mocking yellow eye.

Denser and dimmer grew the woods, great tangled thickets of oak and ash and thorn. The air was full of the drifting leaves; the whole great weald seemed furtively alive. Once a brown furry thing like a stoat flashed right across my path; once I heard the crash of boughs and saw something running among the trees—something that looked like a humpbacked dwarf, all writhing arms and legs; and once, as I neared Devilstone, I heard a faint cry far away in the distance, a whimpering scream like an animal makes when in pain.

I am said to be an imaginative man, and to me those woods were heavy with nameless evil. They seemed to breathe of the ancient world, of witches, warlocks and secret things too horrible to name. Why, even the names on the map were ominous —Hindsmort, Grimshaw, Perkin's Folly, Deathleape Hill and Monksbane.

I slowed down as I passed the copse where my grandparents had been murdered. Great boulders glimmered amoung the trees, but I could not see that rough hewn column that men called Devilstone. That lay far beyond the road, in a grove of ragged thorns.

The shadows deepened; then all at once, the trees thinned out and I saw the huddled roofs of Thurstun, the forge, the inn and the gray old Norman church. The village was lifeless, a place accursed. It seemed to be cowering under a spell. The atmosphere was heavy with thunder, and the sunshine which poured through a rift in the gathering clouds threw long, dancing shadows across the narrow street.

Here and there a shuttered window showed where the Ripper had taken toll; villagers whispered and eyed me as I passed; even the children at their play, looked like capering elves in the sickly sunshine. Round and round they danced in the smithy's yard, now in the light, now in the creeping shadow, while the voice of one little fair haired maid rose clear and high in the hush, like the note of a bell:

*"Bearded goat and horned ram,*
*Gaffer, gammer, maiden, man*
*Ever since the world began."*

I LEFT my car in the Black Horse garage and strolled across for a word with Godwin the blacksmith, whom I had known well in my boyhood. At the sound of my footsteps in the yard he glanced up from his anvil; then down clanged his heavy sledge and he sprang to the door with outstretched hand to meet me.

He was a splendid figure of a man, this smith; short, broad and rugged as an oak. His huge brown face was grimly handsome, with sea-gray eyes deep set 'neath shaggy brows and a ruddy beard like a lion's mane, which swept his naked chest.

"Mr. Meryll," he growled. "I'm glad to see you. Come inside."

He turned his back and lumbered into the forge, while I followed him without a word, for I was used to his shortness of speech. I sat down on a pile of lumber and filled my pipe, while he stood leaning upon the anvil, his long arms crimson in the firelight.

The scent of the wood smoke filled the forge, and again I had that sense of ancient things, as though a veil had been lifted from the past. Vague memories stirred within me of old half forgotten legends. This low roofed cavern, all shadows and yellow glare, the gleaming iron, the earthen floor, the giant with the hammer whose eyes were as fierce as the gray North Sea and whose beard was red as the Rheingold . . . The whole place seemed to reek of the ancient North, of blood and ice and smoking altars, of forests, black as the raven's wing, and rushing rivers, gray beneath the cold half-moon.

Then Godwin turned his eyes upon me and I saw that for all their fierceness, they were kindly English eyes.

"You've come at a bad time, sir," he said. "The Ripper rules in Thurstun Valley. Thank God, I've no kin to lose."

"There's—Emily?"

He shook his head.

"I've lost my girl. She's left me for young Allerdyce o' Grimshaw. She's with 'im now in the woods, they say."

"Allerdyce? I've heard of him."

Ned Godwin wiped the sweat from his eyes and picked up his hammer with an oath.

"O' course you've heard o' him," he growled. "He's well enough known round here. He's bad all through, Jem Allerdyce, but he's got a rare way wi' women. I've warned my Emily and Doctor Crumlin's done what he could, but she fair blazed at him and sent me back my ring. I'm shut of her—finished, I tell yer! She can go, and as for Allerdyce . . . ."

He swing his great hammer above his head and his eyes shone red in the glow of the smithy fire. The crash of the iron drowned his words and he did not speak again until the horseshoe was finished and set aside to cool Then all at once he threw down his hammer and sat down beside me on the lumber.

"Reckon I'm selfish," he said softly. "You've got your troubles too, God knows. I knew your grandfer, Mr. Wells. I was with 'im—just afore 'e died. This Ripper chap maun be a fiend. Just think of it. Two old people who'd done no harm, hacked to death in the thick o' the woods. I tell you straight, if ever a friend o' mine were killed, I'd hunt this murderer day and night——"

"Let's get the facts in order," I cried. "When were my grandparents last seen alive?"

"It would be about half past eight in the evening when I was a-goin' to meet Emily. They was well enough then, but round about midnight, a gamekeeper comes tearin' into the village. He'd found 'em lying in Grimshaw Woods about half a mile from their cottage."

I shuddered.

"It's ghastly, Ned."

He nodded and sank his voice to a husky whisper.

"There's something in this that I can't fathom. These murders are always near Devilstone. You know the place?" He sank his voice still lower and glanced nervously over his shoulder. "It's bad, I tell yer—Devilstone's bad. There's been other killings there o' late that the police don't take no note of."

I caught my breath.

"Murders, you mean?"

"Well not exactly. Animals mostly. Sheep and young lambs. I remember, too, on Good Friday morning, I found an old goat ripped up in the woods."

"Gypsies most likely."

"Aye, so they say. But gypsies doan't kill a goat for nothing. No, Mr. Meryll, it's deeper than that. I've heard my father and grandfer swear that the grove o' thorns weren't holy. There was strange things happened in grandfer's time—and allus on a Thursday."

"Ned," I cried suddenly, "I've read that this friend of yours, Doctor Crumlin, has some rather far fetched theory about these murders. If I remember, he said that the *mord-sul*——"

"Man!" gasped Godwin. "Where did you learn that word?"

I stared at him in astonishment for he was as white as a sheet and trembling like a leaf in the wind.

"Why, I've just told you," I answered lightly. "I read it the other day in the paper. It means 'deathstone' and I fancy it's old German."

Godwin nodded.

"My father knew that word. He allus—whispered it."

"What?" I cried. "Your father knew old German?"

"No, Mr. Meryll, he weren't no scholar; but there's old secret words handed down in Thurstun. Fairy talk, we call it. Keep your mouth shut while you're here, sir. Some of us knows these evil words but we never—says 'em, you understand."

He ceased, and for a moment there was silence, broken only by the voices of the children in the yard; then a soft step sounded on the cobbles and a tall figure loomed in the shadowy doorway—a man with a pale, thin, studious face crowned by a waving mass of silver hair. It was a splendid face, full of power and strength and wisdom, but deep in the blue of the eyes were strange, dancing gleams that spoke of the restless soul within. Savanarola may have had those eyes, Torquemada and Joan the Maid, the best and the worst that the world has known, the dreamers, the fanatics.

Godwin the blacksmith caught his breath and rose slowly to his feet.

"Doctor Crumlin," he exclaimed. "Good evening, sir."

The doctor stepped inside the forge and in the sudden hush that followed, his words fell slowly, like drops of ice cold water.

"Godwin," he said, "I'm afraid I bring bad news."

The blacksmith paled and his hammer fell with a clatter to the floor, while from outside in the smithy's yard came the voices of the children:

*"Bearded goat and horned ram,*
*Gaffer, gammer, maiden . . ."*

"My God!" he gasped at length. "Not —Emily?"

"Ned," said Dr. Crumlin softly, "Emily is dead. They found her murdered, an hour ago, in Grimshaw Hammer Pond."

Godwin grew pale as death, then turned burning red, and the veins stood out upon his forehead. Twice he strove to speak and twice he failed; then with a sob, he snatched up his hammer and staggered to the door.

"Ned!" cried Dr. Crumlin. "Where are you going?"

The blacksmith paused and stood leaning against the lintel, his bare chest heaving and his great fist clenched upon his sledge. I often see that picture now—the gloom of the forge, the livid sky and Godwin the smith, like some old Saxon god, with his tumbled mane and his grim gray eyes.

"Where am I going?" he thundered at last. "I'm a-going to find the Thurstun Ripper. I'll hunt him and I'll kill him—man or fiend!"

I DINED that night with Dr. Crumlin. He lived all alone in a queer old house at the foot of Deathleape Hill—alone that is, save for one old servant who waited on us at table.

It had turned out a cold, wet night, so after dinner we adjourned to the doctor's study, a rambling, oak-paneled room, all nooks and corners. Armour glimmered in the shadows and one wall was entirely covered by great shelves of dusty books. There were maps and old pictures which I coveted, and a fine array of China above the hearth, while the fire, which roared halfway up the chimney, shone on a pair of ancient firedogs of hand-wrought Sussex iron.

The doctor was an excellent host. He gave me a bottle of very good port and an armchair in the ingle.

"And now," he said when I was comfortable, "you tell me that you have come down to Sussex to find the Thurstun Ripper. Perhaps I can help you."

I laughed and lit a cigaret.

"I shall be glad if you will," I answered dryly. "I'm not like Godwin. I need an ally at this game. I've heard that you have some sort of theory——"

"I have very definite knowledge," replied Dr. Crumlin quietly, "and some rumor of it seems to have leaked out. A few days ago a reporter came down from London to see me. I told him just enough of the truth to make him thoroughly incredulous and he did not bother me again."

"And the police?"

Dr. Crumlin heaved a sigh and shrugged his shoulders.

"The police, too, prefer to go on in their own blind, blundering way. They measure and question and search for clues when half an hour with a history book—" He smiled. "Ah well, you cannot blame them. They are not scholars."

"I'm afraid that I don't quite follow you," I cried. "What have these murders to do with history? Wouldn't it be better to search the woods? I saw something strange among the trees today—something that looked like a humpbacked dwarf, all arms and legs."

Dr. Crumlin sat up suddenly and looked at me intently.

"What time was this?"

"About four o'clock. I fancied that I heard a scream."

"Then it must have been the Ripper, sir—the Ripper bent double beneath a body."

"Emily!" I cried aghast.

"Quite possibly." Dr. Crumlin closed his eyes and I saw that he was trembling. "They called me into the cottage where she lay. I'm used to such things, but the sight of her. . . Oh, the beasts," he whispered, "the savage beasts."

"You think that there's more than one Ripper at work?"

The doctor shrugged.

"I cannot say. There may be one or there may be several. I know the type of man to look for."

"That narrows us down. What type have you in mind?"

"My friend," said Dr. Crumlin softly, "we must find an Anglo-Saxon."

I heard the voice of the wind outside as it moaned across the weald. The lashing rain beat against the windows and from far away came the faint low roll of thunder. I had a vision of storm swept woods, of a raving, red haired, stunted giant. Godwin the smith was a Saxon if ever there was one. I remembered his quarrel with Emily, his escape. . . .

I think that the doctor must have seen what was in my mind for, presently, he leaned forward and laid his hand upon my arm.

"Mr. Meryll," he said kindly, "I am sure that it was not Godwin. We have other lines to follow, other clues. I have no doubt that the blacksmith will be able to prove an alibi. He will be under suspicion, I'm afraid, and so will young Allerdyce, Emily's lover; but to find the real murderer, we must dig deep down to the root of things.

"There have been fifteen killings, up to date, including several animals. The bodies have been found all over the woods, and yet it is my firm conviction that the actual slaughter always took place at Devilstone."

"At Devilstone?" I gasped. "That is exactly what Godwin said. But, Doctor, you spoke just now of a clue."

Dr. Crumlin smiled to himself and slowly sipped his wine. Then all at once, h began to croon in a tuneless, singso voice:

*"Bearded goat and hornèd ram,*
*Gaffer, gammer, maiden, man,*
*Ever since the world began."*

I felt my flesh creeping.

"Good Heavens!" I cried. "Tho children! The game they play——"

"Is the voice of an old, old, evil England that sacrificed to Hell. Like most nursery rhymes it is history that has found expression in a song. Once, it kept green the memory of the sacrificial rites, but its very origin was forgotten as men became more civilized, till today that song is a children's game—the few lines that are left."

"But this is impossible!" I exclaimed. "You talk of human sacrifice?"

"Impossible?" cried Dr. Crumlin harshly. "You are in the heart of the weald and nothing is impossible. Think of the names of the country places—records of old crimes. Grimshaw! Monksbane! Thurstun itself, the 'stone of Thor', the god of the storm, whose hammer was the thunder. Remember, sir, these murders have all been on 'Thor's day' and at Devilstone, as the monks renamed it. Devilstone? Bah! Thor's own stone—*der mord-sul!"*

"But you're mad," I gasped. "Do you mean to say——"

"My dear sir," said Dr. Crumlin softly. "Things have been done in the woods of the weald besides which the most ghastly of the voodoo rites is as harmless as a church bazaar."

"Ah, yes," I cried loudly. "In the olden time."

For answer the doctor raised the lid of an oaken coffer which stood beside him and took out two objects which he handed to me to examine. One was a curious iron knife with a short, heavy blade all covered with runic writing; the other appeared to be part of a rusty helmet.

"And now," said Dr. Crumlin, refilling my glass, "we will come down to strictly historical times. Have you ever heard of the Secret People?"

I shook my head slowly and the doctor smiled.

"Well, perhaps that is hardly fair," he admitted. "The 'Secret People' is my own name for the savage tribes that at one time roamed the weald. We have evidence that as late as the Fifteenth Century they actually practiced old, half-forgotten rites and sacrificed to Thor and Odin, the ancient Saxon gods. The chronicles of the time are full of them." He lifted a great brown book from the table and slowly turned the pages. "Just listen to this. It's a passage from the writing of old Sir Thomas Thynne who lived about the time of the Wars of the Roses. '. . . And Peter of Grimshaw was in the sore distress for the Devil had wrought great scathe among his flocks.' Then later: '. . . My sire, my dam, my daughter and only son, all dead at the Foul Fiend's hands. May God have mercy on me a sinner!' You see, Mr. Meryll, the same old rite: *'old man, old woman, maiden, man.'* "

"It may be chance," I answered slowly. "They were superstitious in those days and laid all their misfortunes at the devil's door."

The doctor shrugged.

"Of course that is always possible," he agreed. "Possible, but in this case most improbable, for we know that, a short time after his loss, Sir Thomas led a great force against the forest folk and a score of them were hanged at Peasefield Castle.

"There are other curious records, too, for those who care to read; tales of great fires in the forest at night, of lonely murders and fierce reprisals. For centuries travelers hugged the highroads, for fear of the savages who lived in the greenwood; but even in medieval England such conditions couldn't last. The tribes grew smaller. We hear less of them. They became a myth, a lost people whose very existence was forgotten except in old place names and a child's jingle."

"Then surely that settles it," I cried. "The Thurstun murders could hardly have been committed by tribes that became extinct in the Middle Ages."

"Just a moment. You go too fast." The doctor's strange blue eyes were gleaming and his cheeks were flushed with excitement. "I never said that the Secret People were extinct. We hear no more about them, it is true, but from time to time, say once in a generation, we read of a series of inexplicable crimes—the Extinction of the Rutherfords, the Ockham Nuptials, the Black March of 1830. You see that old helmet in your hand. I dug it up near Devilstone and you will notice that it bears the Avebury crest of the three boars' heads. There can be no doubt that it once belonged to Christopher Avebury of Saltfield Chase, who disappeared on a mile of clear road in the year of the Great Armada. That is one instance; there are others. I have, with great labor, traced them down the centuries."

"And the knife?"

The doctor leaned towards me until his bright blue eyes held mine.

"That knife I found also near Devilstone, deep down in the trunk of a hollow tree. It is almost new and yet—it is an exact copy of the sacrificial knives of the early Saxons."

I sprang to my feet and the great jagged blade fell clattering to the floor.

"Doctor Crumlin," I gasped. "Do you mean that these people—exist?"

The doctor shrugged and stooped to pick up the knife.

"I have no further proof," he answered slowly, "but if they do not—well, a lifetime of study has been wasted. It sounds fantastic, I'll admit, yet descendants, or even one last surviving priest would—fit the case, you understand."

"But it's monstrous, incredible!" I burst out. "This is Twentieth Century Sussex and you speak of a heathen priest, a dead mythology."

"Dead?" cried Dr. Crumlin harshly. "Dead say you?" He sprang to the window and tore aside the curtain. I had a glimpse of driving rain, of great trees straining against the wind. The lightning flamed across the sky and thunder came crackling over the weald like the voice of the old dead gods awakening in the black of night.

"You hear that noise?" he went on quietly. "Our forefathers called the thunder 'the hammer of Thor.' This is the sacred night of Thursday—a night of storm that the old gods loved. Somewhere out there in Grimshaw Woods, the Ripper is hunting for a man—a man to complete the sacrifice."

I knew in my heart that he spoke the truth. Ever since I had entered the Thurstun Valley I had felt the nearness of ancient, evil things. Now, for the first time, I understood why. In this remote, half-forgotten village, the old superstitions slumbered but never died. The old fear still ruled the hearts of the people. The old gods still reigned in the woods of the weald.

"Doctor," I cried hoarsely, "I'm a Christian man and I can't stand any more of this devilry. Someone's being hunted to death in the forest and we're the only ones who know. I must go out, I tell you, or I'll never be able to sleep in my bed again."

Dr. Crumlin gripped my arm with powerful fingers.

"Remember," he said, "there's hideous danger. Thor's looking for a sacrifice. It may be you or I."

For answer I rushed into the hall and struggled into my mackintosh. The doctor donned an old black ulster and seized a heavy stick.

"If you're set on it, I'm with you," he cried. "But I warn you, it's a hopeless task. The Ripper may be anywhere in the woods."

"He may be anywhere in the woods," I answered grimly, "but there's only one place where we can find him. The old monks renamed it well, Doctor Crumlin. They called it Devilstone."

THE storm was at the height of its fury when we took the steep, winding road to Grimshaw Woods. The icy wind was howling through the sobbing, tortured trees; the rain came down in sheets and, all the time, the thunder shook the weald, now faint and rumbling like a distant drum, now pealing and crashing across the sky ere it died away in a long drawn, shuddering moan.

It was really dangerous in the forest. Our eyes were dazzled by the lightning, and twice we heard the roar of branches as some great tree crashed blasted to the ground. At last, we came to a place where the pathway forked and I felt Dr. Crumlin grip my arm.

"Quiet!" he hissed. "There's someone ahead of us."

"Where?"

"By the oak."

I shaded my eyes, but could see nothing for the thick dark trees and the blinding rain.

"We'd better separate," he shouted. "I'll bear to the right and you keep straight on. We'll meet by Devilstone."

Without another word he darted away and I heard him plunging through the bushes.

I was alone in those haunted woods, at dead of night, with a murderer lurking somewhere in the shadows. The fears that had crowded on me all day flocked back and threatened to overwhelm me. It was not the thought of the Ripper that appalled me, but something else—something far stronger and more terrible. Yes, in my heart, it was Thor I feared, the savage old god that the wood folk worshiped, whose altar still reeked in the grove of tangled thorns.

For a moment, I crouched there, numb with terror; then I shook myself and, grasping my stick, I forced myself on towards Devilstone. Unreasoning fear of the supernatural is an evil foe to fight but, at last, I, too, saw a movement among the trees and the sight of a human enemy seemed to give me back my courage. It was just a glimpse of something white, a blurred shape gliding through the shadows; but the sight sent me tearing down the slope, sliding, stumbling over the rocks, leaping great tree trunks, splashing through swamps, breathless, bruised and soaked to the skin. Great writhing tendrils stung my face and swinging branches whipped me; but I never paused until, all at once, I caught my foot in a twisted root and plunged suddenly on my face among the brambles.

For a moment I lay there, stunned by the fall; then dashing the wet hair from my eyes, I staggered slowly to my feet in a sudden, deathlike hush.

I was standing in a little glade, ringed in by oaks and cruel twisted thorns. The ground was cleared for fifty yards and right before me loomed Devilstone like a gray old brooding giant.

I had spent my boyhood at Thurstun so I knew the altar well—a lichened column of rough hewn rock that age had tilted slightly to one side. Slowly I approached, until the monster towered above me. The thunder pealed. The flame of the lightning lit up its battered face. The rock was dark, scarred with black streaks and smudges. . . .

"Crumlin!" I screamed. "Crumlin, come here. There's blood on Devilstone."

Then something black rose out of the ground at my feet and, in an instant, I was overpowered. Long, sinewy arms coiled about my knees. I heard a hoarse, savage grunt as I staggered and fell; then, even as I turned and tried to grapple, I felt the shock of a stunning blow and I plunged down into darkness.

SLOWLY the mists cleared away from my eyes and I felt the stinging lash of the wind and rain. I tried to move, but I was powerless. There was rope round my body, cold stone beneath my hands. I was bound upright to the ancient altar.

With a strangled scream, I struggled to free myself. Sobbing, panting, I writhed and twisted till that black shape loomed out of the shadows again and I saw the glimmer of light on naked iron. Slowly the figure approached; cold, wet hands pawed me. Then, in a blaze of vivid lightning, I saw that it was *Dr. Crumlin* — Crumlin with lips drawn back from his great white teeth and his eyes aglare with madness!

I could see that he was shouting, but through the hellish tumult of the storm, his words came faintly, like a far away whisper:

". . .The last. . .the last of the Secret People. . .forced to steal by guile and cunning. . .sacrifice that is mine by right."

His white face came closer, closer to mine. His eyes shone black through his tangled hair. The devil was laughing, jeering at me.

"O-ho!" he cried. "You understand now. *'Gaffer, gammer, maiden, man. . .'* Same old ritual through the ages. The gaffer is dead; the gammer is dead; the maiden I slew this afternoon and you—you are the man!"

I prayed and pleaded with this madman whose cunning had lured me to Devilstone, but he only smiled and shook his head while his fingers felt the jagged edge of his blade.

Then, all at once, as the thunder crashed, he sprang up the side of the sloping stone and stood, poised motionless above me, his wild hair flying about his head and the rain all running down his face. The wind seized the skirts of his long black ulster and whirled them aloft like the wings of a monstrous bat. And all at once he began to sing—strange lilting words in a guttural tongue that I knew to be old German. Through the crash of the storm, I could catch the rhythm:

*"Eld-sul!. . .Mord-sul!. . .Blud-sul!. . . Thor-sul!"*

More than that I could not follow, but from his gestures I guessed its hideous meaning. The doctor was calling on the demon Thor. The god of the hammer was coming down from the stormy skies to claim me.

I screamed aloud. I raved and tore at my bonds, as from far away came the snap of boughs and the soft, deep thud of a mighty footfall. Through the roar of the storm, I could hear that tread, that ponderous body forcing its way through the bushes. Nearer and nearer it came monstrous, menacing. . . .

I heard the doctor's gasp above me, saw him leap from the altar and sink to his knees as through the black arch of the trees there came stalking an awful primeval figure, his body naked to the storm, his great beard splaying across his chest and a huge iron hammer sloped on his mighty shoulder.

Dr. Crumlin sprang to his feet and tossed his gaunt arms aloft in adoration.

"Thor!" he screeched. "Great god of my fathers."

"To hell with your false gods!" thundered the figure. "I'm Godwin—Godwin the smith!"

Dr. Crumlin stood swaying gently, his eyes of a sudden grown dim and vacant. His pale lips writhed and once he sobbed softly like an angry child. Then, suddenly, he began to laugh, a low, hoarse chuckle in his throat that was more horrible than any raving. Still laughing, he crept towards the smith and they circled slowly round Devilstone.

Twice they passed me, gliding like ghosts; then with a yell, they closed and grappled. Up flashed the knife; up swung the heavy sledge. Down with a crash they came together.

Godwin sprang back in the nick of time and his hammer came down with a thud on the madman's wrist. The doctor reeled and dropped his knife. Moaning with pain he staggered to Devilstone and sank in a heap beneath the great sloping stone of the altar.

Two strokes of that keen blade set me free and the blacksmith lifted me in his arms. I think that my blow must have left me light headed, for I clung to him, whimpering like a child.

"It's no use," I kept crying wildly. "He has spoken the words of the ancient ritual. He has offered a sacrifice to Thor and Thor himself will claim it."

"Thor!" grunted Godwin. "You mean the devil. Back! Back for the love o' God!"

He flung himself with me into the bushes and raised a shaking finger.

"A sign," he gasped. "A sign in the sky."

I glanced up with a shudder, and there, poised high in the void above us, through tangled branches and seething rain, I saw the golden hammer of Thor, the ancient god of thunder. A moment it hung there, glowing like a monstrous star; then down it came, hissing, glowing—down, down to Devilstone.

The altar was rent and split asunder ere the thunderbolt buried itself in the earth. The riven stone leapt high in the air. The dust rose in clouds like the smoke of sacrifice. Then, with a deep and muffled roar, the shattered fragments crumbled in ruin above a black and twisted thing that had once been human.

"They were false gods," whispered Ned. "I tell 'ee . . . They were false gods."

I bowed my head in a sudden hush, for the rain had ceased, the wind had died and the thunder, the mighty hammer of Thor, was rolling away across the forest of the weald.

*For those who like stories of the mysterious and the unusual, the next issue of* EVERYBODY'S *will be especially interesting. There will be "Strange Cargo," by* THOMAS KINGSTON, *a long novelette of a schooner's secret voyage; and "The Pearl Necklace," by* ROY TREVOR, *an exciting short story of the quick fingered crooks of the crack Atlantic liners.*

# AN OUTPOST ON RUM ROW

## By SAMUEL TAYLOR MOORE

IT WAS a few days before Christmas back in 1925 when a motley collection of barnacled ocean tramps and schooners sat brazenly at the edge of our Atlantic coastal boundary, waiting a chance to transfer their bottled contraband to smaller, speedier craft for the run to a shore base—Rum Row. For ten days I had sailed on various ships of the Coast Guard as a war correspondent. Like policemen patrolling a beat, from dawn to dusk we circled the ten mile row of mother booze ships anchored off Gloucester. Their decks were piled high with cases of whisky and wine. Rum sailors taunted us with prolonged swigs from enticing bottles, as we sailed past giving them the onceover.

Occasionally we varied the monotony of the patrol by pursuing sails in the distance, searching in the slimy holds of odiferous codfishermen, fruitlessly. Through the long night watch we made countless surprise visits to the rum fleet. With running lights extinguished we would dash from various points of the compass at full speed, brightening the heavens as we approached with the ear splitting bark of our forward gun sending a star shell aloft in the hope of illuminating some luckless runner taking on cargo. But the cruise was barren.

I sought relief from the monotony of the past ten days with convival friends in New London. When I reported on board the converted destroyer *Downes* the following morning I was suffering from the world's worst hangover. From Port Said to Rio there was not a heebee-jeebee specimen to compare with me. Food was repulsive. What I needed above all else were a few stiff hookers of grog—the hair of the dog that had bit me. But none was to be had. The ship's doctor was sympathetic; but only verbally. We put out into the Sound where all day we lay in a pea soup fog.

At sundown a winter gale blew up, a spanking blow that brushed away the fog veil and made Long Island Sound a bowl of slop. We rolled as only a destroyer can roll, and the brine washing the deck and boiling in the scuppers froze as its hit. I huddled in a corner of the tossing bridge, dying by inches. Lights of merchantmen passed to port and starboard as we headed for Fire Inlet, the neck in the bottle to the Sound. At last I dozed fitfully. Excited commands of the skipper for all hands on deck aroused me sometime after midnight. Vaguely I hoped we were sinking. But no such luck.

With running lights extinguished a schooner had almost run us down. The bow searchlight flashed on the luckless craft. Suffering though I was, the sight was one to be remembered. Perfectly framed in the round arc of our jacklight was a two-master with full sails billowing as she sought to show us her heels. It was hopeless, a grayhound against a Saint Bernard. We sped alongside with a shivering gun crew at station. The skipper megaphoned to the sailing master to come about. We saw the jib drop and a moment later the mainsails were fluttering idly.

Into the whaleboat clambered a boarding party. She dropped into the trough of the sea with a splash. The searchlight followed their thrilling, tossing voyage. There was a moment of expectancy. Would the sailormen resist? Not if the skipper realized a five inch rifle was trained amidships on his hull! No. In a few moments a blinker message came over the waters:

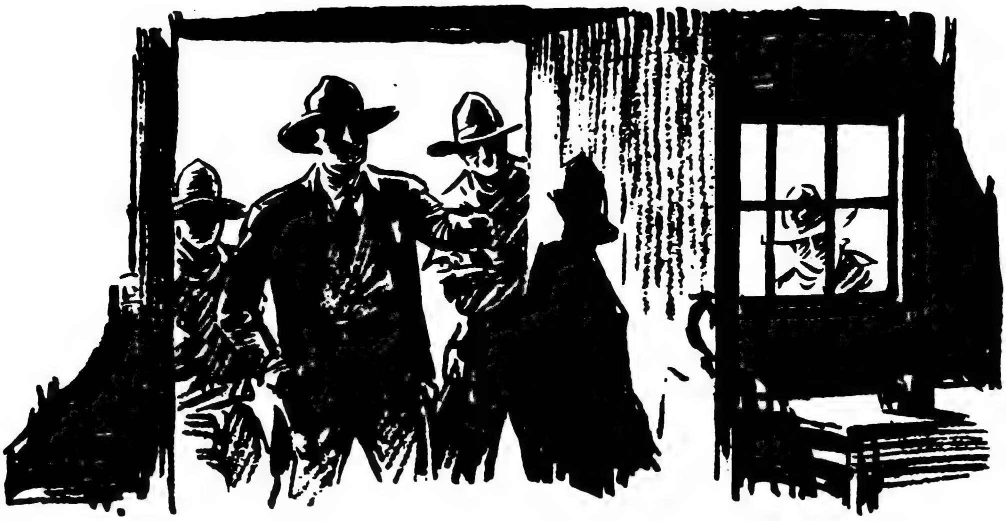
SCHOONER J. DUFFY OF LE HAVRE, NOVA SCOTIA. TWO THOUSAND EIGHT HUNDRED CASES WHISKY AND WINE, ONE HUNDRED FIFTY BARRELS WHISKY.

I smiled happily. Until we dropped anchor in the Thames I imagined what I would do aboard that prize. The cup of surcease from my sufferings was practically at my lips. I got aboard the launch that carried breakfast to the prize crew. In a minute I would be well again—and happy.

As we came alongside the schooner, a gruff old Irishman was pulling away in a rowboat, a man who wore the cap and insignia of the Customs Service. He grunted congratulations to the lieutenant in charge of the launch.

"I've sealed everything," he reported. "There ain't a drop on board anyone can reach."

There in the cutter I collapsed.



# SMOKE SETTLES

### *The Story of a Mining Camp Throttled by a Criminal Ring, and of the Stranger Who Challenged Its Sinister Reign*

### By ANTHONY M. RUD

## CHAPTER I

### MAGPIE MESA

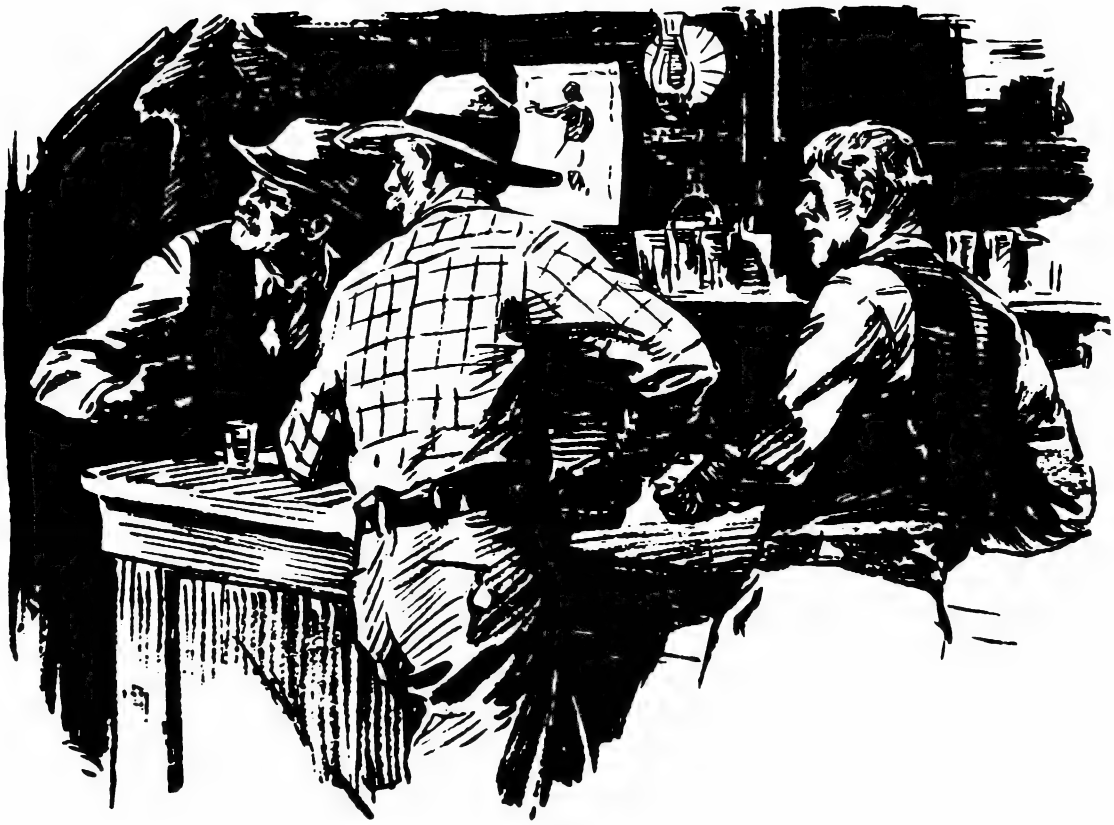
TORRENTIAL June rains had battered and surged over the warm land through the early night. Now the morning sun was three hours high, and the low mesa was steaming. Cicadas droned in the scrub oaks and sycamores. A mangy, patchy, drab coated jackrabbit, drunk with the instinctive knowledge of delicious green herbage to sprout before the day was over, flirted his heels in play—and then suddenly awed by his own daring, bobbed in a succession of haphazard, three legged leaps for a drenched and glistening thicket of chamisal.

A bony, hammerhead of a horse—a skinny giant, pale dappled gray in color—came rocking along the outside edge of the mesa. The peculiar left shoulder motion of the strange looking animal made it appear that he was lame. But he was not lame. His gait was his own—or perhaps the teaching of some trailwise master. That long, gliding sprawl of a walk, comparable to the loafing side stroke of an accomplished human swimmer, was deceptive because of the hammerhead's full seventeen hands of height. It covered the miles even more swiftly, in the long ride, than the mincing canter and dog walk of a short legged mustang.

For this dappled gray gelding, though only a seven year old horse, was something of a celebrity in another part of the West. As a five year old, and even skinnier seeming, except through his sturdy chest, than he was this hot morning on the Mesa of Magpies, The Weaver had won the Lamar to Prescott endurance day and night race.

The Weaver had come in without a real saddle sore, without a spur mark, in seventeen hours, four minutes, and fifty-three seconds. A full hour and then some ahead of Thundercloud, the Walkin' John ranch entry, and betting favorite from Demijohn Valley.

With his great height, the gray was no cow pony, naturally. Yet through speed and bottom he had earned first place in the affections of his master, a disreputable appearing cowpoke if there ever was one. Perhaps the fact that a State line and one hundred miles and more of the new State lay behind, accounted for The Weaver's choosing. Or possibly it was because this



## A Complete Novelette

country was not popularly supposed to be cattle range.

Why not? The rider, slouched with right knee curled about the horn of his "bear trap" Miles City saddle, looked panoramically at the two mile stretch of mesa to his right, and made a clicking sound of wonder with his tongue. Why, if there was any water on Magpie Mesa, the place was a cow paradise! The grama grass was browned, yet it stood more than fetlock deep to horse. That meant that rains like the one of the night just past were not unheard of, by any means.

And down there a hundred feet, when he looked off the faint trail toward the left and west, he could see a winding ribbon of azure, hidden by piñon, alders, and a profuse jumble of chaparral and lesser vegetation. But that valley—was it the place he sought, after all? The rider of the gray gelding was far from certain. He could not discern the smoke of even a prospect hole. Yet Soledad Valley was reputed overpopulated, at least with certain kinds of men. A rich but narrow strike, where the gold, silver and copper ore, slanting too abruptly through the earth toward Singapore, down through the ascending aorta of the world, had brought an influx of gold seekers far too great in number.

The rider scratched through his bushy beard, for all the world like a man unaccustomed, who would like above all things to shave deep and clean. But that could hardly be so. Surely this gravedigger of decency who bestrode The Weaver never could have cared much for the luxury of a face that is smooth! Probably his cheeks would appear wrinkled and yellow like those of a pale mummy, once the black, inch long brush were scraped off. One would imagine so, at any rate. For the rider, take him away from his horse, and he doubtless would look something like the contraptions the nesters, back east in Kansas, hung up in their cornfields to scare away the crows.

Clad in torn chaparejos, patched and threadbare overalls thrust into run-over, ancient half boots with one spur missing, a blue silk shirt stained and torn, a greasy looking greenish brown corduroy vest, on the leather back of which were spots of mildew and gun oil, and topped with a battered nondescript black felt which rain and drying had stiffened into ludicrous waffle shape, he ought to have been an object of instant sympathy—a waddy obviously down on his luck so far they'd have to hang him to a high limb to get him up to the level of an even break. . . .

That is, he might have been treated kindly enough, perhaps given a swamper's job in some saloon, enough to eat and a few drinks a day, except for two things: his weapons, and that awesome thatch of hair which hid his features. These marked him as a man to watch carefully.

Mexican style, a frayed double-web bandoleer about half full of .44 cartridges was slung crosswise from his left shoulder. The stock of a rifle projected from the scabbard under the left saddle fender.

He wore no other gunbelts, or at least none holding cartridges. Which made it apparent that his short guns chambered the same cartridge as his rifle.

But looped from a plain black leather belt about his rather slender waist were two straps going down the sides of his hips, connecting with loops drawn tight around chaps and thighs. And there depended two Cheyenne pivot holsters, holding a pair of heavy six-shooters with businesslike butts of dull black wood.

Legend to the contrary, the West has known few real two-gun men; killers or hunted men who considered it worth while to put up with the fatiguing drag and slap of a pair of weighty weapons, especially on a long horseback journey. Any ordinary cowpoke would have had his lone gun tied back in his warbag all the way, unless he had reason to expect trouble.

This hirsute man was a stranger. He packed two guns and a rifle, and had them ready for swift action. Therefore he was either hunter or hunted, and as either, a good man for peaceful citizens to steer clear of.

A RUNTY upthrust of bare granite, the highest point of the mesa, attracted the rider's attention. He kneed The Weaver toward it, then flung down the reins, dismounting somewhat stiffly.

A two minute scramble brought him to the top; and there, shading his face with the stiffened felt, he scanned every mile of his back trail to the southeastern horizon. Then he grinned; a momentary flash of white, even teeth in the jungle of black beard; a gleam of eyes which showed a peculiar greenish blue in the direct sunlight; and climbed down in leisurely fashion.

"No sign of 'em" he drawled cheerfully to the gaunt horse; and his voice had a ring and a resonance quite as surprising as that flash of white teeth amid the blackness. "For a ringboned, spavined, swaybellied old crowbait, so tied up with age and rheumatiz your teeth are curly, you shore can reel off the miles!"

As he spoke he rubbed The Weaver's velvety nose, and removed the bar bit. The gelding nickered suggestively and arched his long neck, looking back toward the slicker roll tied at the cantle of the saddle.

The tall scarecrow chuckled.

"Yeh, there's one good feed left, and I reckon you've earned it, old Sieve O' Slats."

He untied the roll, brought out a salt bag partly filled with oats, emptied the contents into his hat, and held it while The Weaver hungrily munched.

"Rambling boneyard," he grinned affectionately, "I aim to feed you up till you forget you ever had a rib. And if Chub Lennon ever gets you back, it'll be because——"

Of a sudden he tensed, his words ended abruptly. From somewhere off to the west side of the mesa, *not* the direction from which he had expected signs of pursuit, had sounded, faint but clear, a *kling-g-g* of metal on rock, followed by a corrosive curse, which, hollowed out and flattened by distance, yet somehow sounded pain-filled and panicky!

Gone was the scarecrow's leisurely satisfaction. He set down the hat, in which some oats remained.

"Stay right there and grab yourself some grass, Old-timer!" he whispered, patting the down arched neck. "No noise, mind!" He pinched the gray's nostrils in admonition.

Then swiftly he examined his six-shooters, blowing out some dust they had accumulated on the previous day's ride. Then crouching, striding swiftly, taking advantage of each clump of chaparral, he made his way toward the brush concealed western brink of the mesa, approximating as nearly as he could the point from which the sounds had come. . . .

"STORM SANDELL, or that plaguey under-shurff of his'n, ain't more'n two mile back, an' ridin' like blue blazes! An' he ain't alone this time, nuther! They's seven-eight deppities——"

"To hell with them, an' you too! Stand 'em off, if they come. I ain't goin' to ride further an' bleed to death in my saddle." The voice was pain laden.

Muffled sounds ensued—growled words from several men, exclamations, the varied sounds of dismounting and getting ammunition and weapons ready for a disadvantageous stand. It was plain that some of the men were in favor of lingering.

Crouched in the dense thicket three or four yards from the edge of the mesa, the bearded man could hear every word plainly. Yet he could see nothing at all. He guessed that just below him a winding trail from Soledad Valley attained a shelving outthrust, perhaps the last point of vantage for fugitives, before striking up and over the open mesa.

There were four men and five horses below there. Or perhaps there was a fifth man, who had nothing to say. The listener above learned about the animals as they were being watered.

"Shucks, we'll hit a spring right over there below Old Baldy. Right now the horses come first. An' I'd like to see anybody water five animules outa one canteen. . . ."

"Oh, awright," growled a heavy voice. "Here 'tis. Jessasame, we get holed up hyar on account o' Slim, an' water is goin' to be damn vallyble. Hoss blood ain't good drinkin'. Too damn salty."

"Slim's all right. He'll be ready in a minute."

"Shore as hell I'm all right. If you damn buzzards——"

A new voice, doubtless that of the lookout, the fifth and hitherto silent man, broke in:

"They ain't started up. Ain't found the trail, looks like. Mebbe we got a lot more time'n we thought. Now cut out the smokin' an' don't talk so doggone much. Sounds carry a long ways. . . ."

IT WOULD have seemed the prudent thing for the listener above to have retired quietly, returned to his horse, and then ridden to one side of what palpably was not his personal quarrel with the law. And that would have been easy, too. Given a margin of minutes, a horse like The Weaver, and a certainty of no pursuit on the part of these men who sought safety only for themselves, and the black bearded scarecrow surely could have gone on his way unmolested.

But for some reason he stayed. He even inched gradually closer to the edge, worming his way through the tangle of brush. His six-shooters parted the thorny mountain laurel and chamisal. He was near the edge now, he knew, though he could not see anything. The voices sounded almost straight down. Too late he wished that he had looked for the mesa opening of this shielded trail—one which apparently a sheriff could not locate readily from below.

Strange that he should chance his own safety in this manner! Yet the frowsy headed, black bearded stranger, finding that before him the earth atop the rimrock crumbled away to vacancy, did not attempt to advance further. Cautiously, first lifting both revolvers clear of all the thorny branches, he slowly stood up. If he could just see all of the men below, over the sights of his .44's he could——

Disaster! Without knowing it, he had reached an overhang of the mesa rim, an eyebrow of tangled roots and the mesa dust they had gathered. Something gave away beneath the man's left foot. It went through! Of a sudden, his other foot broke into the tangle and through to the knee. The footing gave, held, slipped further!

Caught, tripped and thrown, cursing his lack of caution, too late, the rimrock eavesdropper smashed face forward through the last of the thorny withes, pulled free, and fell, landing twelve feet below on his shoulders and the back of his neck.

Instantly three men, keyed up to any sort of savagery, were upon him. But there was no need of further violence. The black bearded stranger was completely unconscious.

"No—hey, lay off that. Don't kill him! Don'tcha see? Turn him over on his face. Yeah, like that. Now, Slim was limpin' when he got to his hoss—from that damn under-shurff spikin' him in the laig. An' they knowed it; thass why they follered so fast. Well, how about this? Ain't it perfect?"

The speaker, a tall, walrus mustached man who talked from the side of his mouth, deliberately drew a colt .45 from a spring clip beneath his left arm, thumbed back the hammer, and shot a slug through the stranger's right calf.

## CHAPTER II

### CAPTIVE

TEN slow minutes passed before the wounded man groaned and pushed himself to his side. The leg burned, yet its wound was not serious. It had almost ceased to bleed. His head and neck pained, and a right shoulder blade felt as though it was broken; but as the minutes dragged along, the man on the ground ascertained the astonishing facts that he had been left alone, and that except for a right boot half full of blood and a stinging tear through the outside flesh and muscle of that calf, he seemed to be in workable shape.

He sat up, pulled off the boot, and bound his own bandanna tightly over the ripped flesh. Then gingerly he donned the boot, and swaying, rose to his feet. For a moment he had to clutch at a rock outthrust, or fall.

It was going to be sore and stiff as all getout, he reflected; but if he could find an easy trail up to the mesa where his horse had been left, he'd be all right. That is, if they hadn't taken The Weaver. . . .

*"Hey! Stick 'em up!"*

A puffing, excited little man, dragging a horse by the headstall, had just appeared through the chaparral at the far end of the ledge, where evidently a masked trail came from below. At sight of the supposed quarry he yelled his surprise. But then, quick as thought, he dropped the leather, and leveled a Winchester carbine.

Had the bearded stranger been himself, he surely would have heard the sounds of that approach, and taken precautionary measures. As it was, the shouted command came to him as from a vast distance. He half turned, saw the menace of the leveled carbine, and grinned vaguely. Releasing his clutch upon the rock he raised both hands shoulder high, reeled and slid against the rock face to the ground—still holding his hands up, and showing that flash of white teeth amid the beard.

"Got one of 'em! Watch fer the other four!" yelled the captor with the carbine, advancing slowly, flashing glances here and there to guard against a possible ambuscade.

But six others came crowding up the trail after him. They were roughly dressed individuals, miners, and just at this moment they appeared ready to let their hotheaded under-sheriff leader take most of the chances of the pursuit. They crowded around, cursing the bearded man, and casting apprehensive glances at the trail beyond.

"So I did wing yuh, eh?" demanded the leader of the posse, grim elation in his voice. He snapped handcuffs over the captive's wrists. "Couldn't make it no further, eh, Ugly Mug? Well, I reckon yuh won't do no more pay roll robbin' fer quite a spell now."

"Le's string him up an' go home," suggested another.

"Yeh, they got too much start fur us to ketch 'em on mules." It was plain that enthusiasm for the pursuit had waned with this partial success.

"There won't be no hangin'. Not now," the officer stated with crisp finality. "This jigger's goin' back to the hoosegow, so's my boss an' me can kinda work him over."

"The hell he is!" A hoarse voice growled protest. "Who the devil you think you are, Doty, huh? This guy——"

The little under-sheriff whipped about, brown eyes snapping.

"Tha's enough from a hangback like you, Muller!" he cracked out. "You're a bully an' a yallerbelly, but I'm boss here!"

And despite sullenness and mutterings, the fiery little officer got obedience for the time being. Roped to one of the mules which had been left lower down the trail to Soledad Valley, the prisoner was started back toward the mining town where a Wells, Fargo messenger lay dying, and four hundred unpaid miners who worked the Ponder Group waited to vent their anger upon someone.

"What's yore handle, fella?"

The under-sheriff ranged his horse alongside the captive's mule, where the trail broadened.

"Smith," returned the outlaw shortly. Then he seemed to think better of his curtness, perhaps remembering that except for fficer he now might well be dangling a cottonwood limb back there on the f the mesa. "Call me Smoke Smith, u want to. It's as good a name as

ll right; Smoke Smith 'tis. I'm Bill , as I reckon you know."

' meetcha," nodded the bearded man.

ty stared.

ell, mebbe we *ain't* met up. I c'd etter if you was shaved. Yo're a gazabo jessasame," he said doubt-

sudden thought struck the man who himself Smith, and he jerked erect e mule. "Good Lord!" he ejaculated. d just come to him, with the gradual ng of his wits, that he had left The er saddled, up there on the waterless !

ay Doty, you look like a square fella," id earnestly, leaning sidewise, a scowl orry creasing his forehead. "I'll trade anything I got in the world for one !"

e under-sheriff grinned. Maybe this ore wasn't as tough as he looked. at the jail, when rheumatic old Storm ell and he got working on the captive, ight be possible to learn something ite about the gang which had terror- Soledad for so long.

o're talking, fella," he said shortly.

oke Smith nodded.

here's a lot about this which ain't ay you think it is, Doty. As soon as e old Storm, I'll prove that to you ty. But right now——"

Huh?" interjected the officer. "You d pal of Storm's, mebbe?" His voice a queer intonation.

et that ride. Storm'll know me. t I want right now is somep'n different. there on the mesa, in about two hun- yards from the edge, I left a hoss. a good hoss. I know one fella who'll a thousand dollars for him right to- ow. Now, his bridle's down an' drag- . He'll stay there—an' there ain't any r on that mesa, is there? I'm telling he's a real hoss!"

ow Bill Doty, under-sheriff, was young as hotheaded as fighting spitfires his ever have been. Yet he had a share of e, and could use it if given time. Des- the disreputable appearance of his ner he sensed much that was unusual in the bearded man. To begin with, the latter spoke calmly and in better range English than might have been expected. Then he had not shown either fear or belligerency. Now he was making a play for the life of a horse—and actually saying that he had been riding an animal valued at one thousand dollars!

Well, outlaws had to have fine horses for their getaways, Bill supposed. He asked more details, and was impressed by the captive's earnestness. Of course, Bill Doty was not much of a horseman himself, having come to this mining country, four years earlier, direct from the lake freighter docks of Superior, Wisconsin; yet he could understand the picture Smoke Smith drew. A splendid, loyal animal, trained to stand when the reins were down, would stay right there on the mesa till he died from thirst.

In the end Bill Doty capitulated—to a certain extent. They had reached the rolling rock and meadow flats of Soledad, when a Mexican youth with a sleepy burro came toward them on the trail. Bill flipped over a shiny silver dollar, issued an order, and took charge of the packed burro. The Mexican youth, eyes ashine over this sudden, unexpected wealth, darted into a sudden run along the mesa trail.

"Pascal will get yore hoss if he's there like you said," Bill informed the prisoner. "An' I'll collect the dollar outa yore hide, if he ain't."

The black beard parted in a grin.

"Thanks!" said Smoke Smith. "I don't think there'll be any trouble. S'pose you run yore hand down here inside my shirt—yeah, under that Durham sack. That's it. Take what you find there. Unpin it. Now, if you give that to Storm, and keep yore mouth shut a-plenty, I reckon he'll refund yore dollar, and maybe bean you with a six-gun, to boot!"

Something happened to Bill Doty, under-sheriff, right then. Wonderingly, he obeyed, all the time keeping a sharp watch so that this bandit prisoner did not put over a fast one. Though how that could be done handcuffed, disarmed, and with mounted miners ahead and behind, was not easily guessed.

Bill's hand reached under, past the bare neck of the outlaw, down toward the left breast, where, outside, was the sack of Bull Durham and the paper of "blankets."

There the officer's fingers touched metal. The fingers suddenly trembled as they closed on a small, hard object.

Right then, staring straight ahead of him, Bill Doty went rigid. His brown eyes grew round, saucerlike, the irises swimming in bluish white like new raisins in bowls of skimmed milk. Beads of cold sweat started out on his brow and upper lip—and Bill Doty was inured to the suns of Soledad, too.

At first he stuttered, not even withdrawing his hand. But then words came, agonized words, low toned, apprehensive.

"It—it's *you!*" he breathed. "You! Why—why—y-you damn fool!"

"Sh!"

A long silence followed this admonition. Bill Doty removed his hand, taking the small metallic object with him. He thrust it away in a deep pocket. And he wisely said nothing more as they came into Soledad, although in one minute every shred of the officer's elation had been wiped away in self-blame and apprehension.

## CHAPTER III

### THE DEADLY ALIBI

THERE was no doubt at all concerning the state of public opinion in Soledad. For many weeks, pay rolls coming in, and concentrate from the stamp mills going out, had been preyed upon by a gang of bandits which seemed to possess uncanny sources of information concerning just when and where to strike. Old Jerry Ponder, owner of the richest mines in the vast county, and Svend Strom, his son-in-law, had used the last scraps of their combined ingenuity. Concentrate—bulky stuff at best—had been shipped out in several ways, and secretly. At first, armed miners had been used as guards. But the ordinary miner, even with a shotgun in his hands, had proved ready and even anxious to paw the air when commanded by a brusk voice issuing from the chaparral. Later, old Jerry had journeyed down to Coconino, a country of his youth, and there hired four grizzled old gunfighters whom he knew he could trust. All four were dead, slaughtered from ambush without warning; and the incoming pay roll they had guarded, had vanished. And there had been other killings, other robberies. A virtual embargo upon gold and currency had been drawn metal capital of Soledad County. region, overrun with unlucky turned miners at a wage, bitter truculence. Only the fact and his big blond son-in-law took shifts with the mine and mill far had prevented unreasoning

Reaching the outskirts of town, the cavalcade avoided street. Disregarding growled the part of his posse, Bill Doty back of the tailings dump of Mill No. 2, around through the can alley to the rear of the Saloon and the chile joint next reached the jail unseen, for at even though sullen and malignant their pay had failed again, nine-Soledad labored in the mine the surface, or in the jarring The remainder—gamblers, dance-barkeepers, bouncers, for the still slumbered. Their tasks assume importance until sundown.

In fact, these parasitic ones worst sufferers from the depreda the bandit gangs; for no matter be said in anger against old Jerry and his blond Viking of a owners of the richest mines, the knew from past experience that be recompensed—perhaps three pay one, as had happened; but they paid if it took every pennyweig bullion output! But the saloon gamblers had no such assurance; day which passed without the usu harvest, represented money would never touch. A miner was blowing his pay; but he had lear how to get enough liquor and gambling to satisfy him for the extra money, received at doubled or pay days, was apt to be thrown foolish luxuries like boots, or suits clothes—or even he might try to little.

The miners of the posse allowed Doty to escort Smoke to jail, and dismounted, but there browed Muller turned savagely under-sheriff.

"Yeah, go ahead an' put him damn' hoosegow!" he snarled. a chance he's got to stay there!"

With a flashing motion Bill

d a short barreled .45, shoving
g muzzle straight into the bully's

right around, fella, an' keep
he advised coldly. "Storm an'
ry about our business our own

iners, resentful—though none
e gross Muller made any com-
rned and led away the mules.
w right straight in through this
er Robber; no funny business!"
ed Bill Doty, turning to his
From the savage tone of his
e of the posse, still within earshot,
ve suspected the under-sheriff's
e. With the outer door slammed
d behind him, he passed over
leer of cartridges and the two
evolvers taken from the prisoner.
likely to need 'em—this town's
e a hell of a lot; it's chewin' nails
n' cyanide. But le's go see what
ndell's got to say. He didn't look
thisaway—not any."

sheriff was not in his quarters
t at that time. A tall, bleak
tured, prematurely white haired
is middle forties, Storm had fought
gainst the reign of robbery and
which had descended upon Soledad.
ush with the organized gang which
n half a dozen men out of hand,
many more, and practically estab-
blockade upon the whole of the
valley, a ricocheting slug had
e kneecap from his left leg, grind-
ters of bone from the femur as it
through. The wound had healed
and some obscure infection akin
most painful sort of rheumatism,
led in the joint and tendons. Storm
l to hobble about by aid of a stout
t he alone knew the meaning of
ew lines of suffering deep etched
hawk nose to his chin.

uld not ride, and so Bill Doty had
impromptu posse on this occasion.
at the inaction, unable to sit with
hands, Storm Sandell had done
g hitherto well nigh unknown in
n, temperate life. He had bought
of whisky, hobbled to a vacant
ble in George Small's "office"—a
ove off the large bar and gambling
Small's Ace Of Spades Saloon—and there proceeded to drink it slowly, and glower at a crude and gaudy lithograph of a beefy burlesque queen, transfixed to the wall by the blade of a rusty poniard.

Storm did not get drunk. The level of his bottle lowered slowly. In spite of a probable intention, the habits of a lifetime were too strong. And likewise the grip of terrible, remorseless anger against these desperadoes who had murdered young Brett Sandell, his nephew, would not loosen for a weakling's pint of peppered red eye.

The afternoon waned. About four o'clock a pair of professional gamblers drifted in. Until some other prospects appeared, they were glad enough to pass the time at fifty cent limit stud poker against the sheriff and each other. It was a strictly square game; these professionals never tried any skullduggery with Storm. In the first place, it was not safe; he had nailed two or three skilful manipulators of the pasteboards in times past. And one of those, foolish enough to back a sleeve hidden derringer against a holstered six-shooter, now was playing his last seven-high bust in Soledad's boot hill.

Secondly, Storm Sandell was the Law. Vain though the ambition was, these card sharks actually aspired to be known as "square gamblers." They knew that Storm Sandell knew that among professionals no such curious freak could ever exist. Yet the urge was there. They played straight stud with an unmarked deck. And Storm won thirty dollars.

So it was that when, at five-thirty in the evening, Bull Muller and the other posse members came into the Ace Of Spades, lining up at the deserted bar—the on-shift miners and mill men still had a half hour to labor—Muller saw the sheriff instantly, but Storm did not look up from his faced pair of jacks on which he was betting one twenty-five cent red chip.

The whispered word was passed. One of the bandits had been captured, and now was at the jail guarded only by Bill Doty! The sheriff himself had not been informed. Each miner who arrived was told the news; and amid a preternatural silence the Ace Of Spades began to fill with brooding, angry men—men who speedily decided upon the only method they knew by which the wrongs of Soledad might be partially avenged.

A slender Mexican youth, son of the

woman who cared for the quarters of Bill and Storm at the jail, came furtively through the swing doors. He was recognized as a probable messenger to the sheriff. Strong hands seized him, stifled his whimpered outcry, and bundled him outside. While back there at the jail, Bill waited impatiently for his chief, the messenger lay gagged and bound in a lean-to back of the blacksmith shop.

With the further consumption of whisky, and a sudden crowding due to the arrival of twenty or thirty more off-shift miners in one body, the whispered mutter in the barroom rose to a buzz, to a guttural roar. Though Storm himself might have disregarded the unusal disturbance some time longer, not so the two gamblers with whom he played.

"Sounds like they're wolfin' raw meat!" observed one of the pair, tossing in his cards. "Guess I'll see what's doin'." He kicked back his chair. The game was over.

Storm swung about and listened. A frown creased his forehead. He hobbled upright, peering out at the excited crowd. At the alcove door, however, a revolver was suddenly thrust against his chest, and the leering, triumphant visage of Bull Muller appeared behind it.

"G'wan back there an' set down!" snarled Bull. "This ain't yore business, Storm. We ain't aimin' to hurt you, but. . . ."

"I see." The icy voice of the sheriff cut in. "That's mighty kind of you, Bull. What's all the ruckus? The posse back?"

"Yeah. We caught one of them bandits, an' we're goin' to string him up! Guy calls hisself Smoky Smith, or suthin' like that. He's gonna smoke on the end of a smokin' rope!"

At the sound of the captive's name Storm suddenly straightened, and an expression of incredulity flashed across his countenance. Yet in the space of a heartbeat his features again were masked.

"You positive you got the right fella, eh?" he queried, seeming to ponder.

"Sure thing!" boasted Bull. "One of us peppered him in the laig, an' we got him when he had to stop. The other yaller coyotes left him behind—scairt to scrap it out."

He neglected to mention that it had been the under-sheriff who had engaged the fleeing bandits, or that Bull himself
but persuaded other members of
that there was no use in such
pursuit of armed and desperate
could ambush an equal number
greatest ease. As organizer of the
party, which Bull privately de
would wipe out the arrogant Bill
well as the bearded prisoner,
ready to take whatever glory
snatch.

"I didn't ever notice they wa
in guts," said Storm dryly.

A STRANGE interruption ca
The thunder of gallopin
sounded plainly above the
expectancy of the half aroused m
region where few men rode hors
serving as pack and saddle be
most part—the sound gained
attention. Along the road from
raced five mounted men, dusty a
stained.

Traversing half the main str
pulled up abruptly before the
Spades, tossed reins to the gro
strode a trifle stiffly toward the swi

They entered, and Soledad
hardbitten, grim faced men in the
battered Stetsons and scuffed w
chaparejos of the cattle range. No
more than a single weapon in
these looked businesslike and rea

They did not go to the bar.
they spread fanwise in the ope
inside the doors, and stared sea
about the circle of faces turned
them. Evidently their scrutiny
unrewarded, for the man who see
be their leader, a rotund but
muscled man with a drooping san
tache which gave his full cheeks a
choly cast, turned toward Storm
leaning in the doorway. The star
and to the left on Storm's unbutto
no doubt gave the speaker his clu
to address.

"I reckon we've crossed the li
Nye?" he questioned, drawling his

"Yeah. Eleven miles back."
the menace of Bull Muller's gun wit
seemed to have taken command
situation.

"Then we ain't got any 'special
ity, I s'pose. I'm Lennon, shurff
This-here's my posse." He indica

ar with a brief gesture. "We been a hossthief—an' his tracks come This is Soledad, ain't it?"

, Soledad. I'm Sandell, sheriffin' eabouts," Storm replied. "What mbre this hossthief?"

on growled from a dry throat.

s a dirty two-gun buzzard. Fastest n Nevada 'th a pair of hoglegs. out as tall as you, shurff, wearin' beard an' black hair—I don't he's ever combed it none since he n. He's done some wide-loopin', ."

" queried Storm.

-loopin' is stealin' cows," explained with patient sarcasm. "He's done a lot of good whitefaced cows, d 'em, an' sold 'em round to camps. Them damn miners don't —"

oke off, seeming to realize that his e was nintey-nine per cent of the e had been about to denounce. But ere men of sufficiently acute per- there in the soiled red shirts of the ck fraternity. A low growl of ani- answered him.

now he's gone a mite too far!" d on the "foreign" sheriff. "He's y pet hoss—a racin' half-Arab, e-two thousand dollars!"

y reward on that hoss?" queried with deceptive gentleness.

on sniffed.

l no!" he retorted. "In Nye we ave to pay money to git our out- e you do hereabouts. We *git* 'em!"

mph. Wa-al, Mr. Sheriff Lennon," d Storm with his anger apparently "Soledad ain't yore kind of town, y. Wa-al, maybe we're plumb glad *t!* Now what was you plannin' to that Smoky Smith, s'pose you ever ch up to him?"

g him—or drag him bloody!" An- f the Nye men made ferocious an-

n nodded slowly.

-huh," he said. "Wa-al, Mister , I ain't lookin' for no trouble 'th t I ain't *dodgin'* it! S'pose we-all ree drinks? I set up the first, you e second, an' George Small here does ors for the house?"

proposition met with instantaneous l, except possibly on the part of the visitors. They consulted, while Storm tossed two double eagles on the bar, and the crowd of miners surged up three deep along the twenty foot length of cherry and brass.

It developed that the visiting sheriff was somewhat embarrassed. Before he accepted the first glass, he edged around and spoke in a husky stage whisper to Storm Sandell. The latter did not seem troubled.

"Sure! Sure!" he replied heartily, not troubling to throttle down his deep voice. "You can send me the dinero any old time!" And he clinked out two more gold-pieces into Lennon's palm.

Every man in the room understood that the cattle sheriff had come away so speedily that he had neglected to bring any money with him. Covert grins and open expressions of disgust greeted the revelation.

Yet the three drinks were enjoyed according to schedule. And then Storm deigned to respond to Lennon's persistent queries. Storm was grinning. He heard that this base born miscreant had dared to rustle Lennon's own prize horse, an animal known as The Weaver. The deed had been accomplished at midnight of the night before.

"At midnight—and over in Nye? You're sure of that?" The question rang out resonantly, reaching the ears of every man in the room.

"Shore, why not? We took out after him right off. We been trailin' him since. He got up on that-there mesa east of here, an' then his tracks got hid by a lot more. But we know he's come thisaway. . . ." Sheriff Lennon was positive. The liquor seemed to have loosened his vocal cords.

"Wa-al then, you jiggers can ride back, I reckon," said Storm decisively. "Stealin' a hoss is bad, but the guy we got we're goin' to try for suthin' a hell of a lot worse. Am I right, men?"

A thunderous yell of approval greeted his words. All Soledad—no matter what they had thought of their crippled sheriff heretofore—was delighted at the manner in which old Storm was putting it over on these arrogant strangers from the cow range. Bull Muller was forgotten. He sulked down at the extreme corner, and was shoved and shouldered by men he ordinarily bullied.

Sheriff Lennon protested wordily, but to no effect. At the last he even offered a penurious one hundred dollars reward for the return of Smoke Smith and the gray hammerhead horse to Nye County. He was jeered, and jostled to his mount. Under pressure that soon would have become unbridled violence, except for his sudden and prudent acceptance of the miners' ultimatum, he was hurried on the back trail to Nye, with his posse.

And it was only when the strangers had disappeared, and the gang of miners again were assembling, picking up the threads of their anger against the gang which had so persistently despoiled Soledad, that the brilliant corollary of it all occurred to Storm Sandell.

"Why, my God, men!" he cried, lifting himself to sit upon the bar and raising his cane for attention. "I jest thought of suthin'! If this-here Smoke Smith was over in Nye last night at twelve o'clock like they said, he *couldn't've* been here at nine-thirty and helped do that robbery! He *couldn't've!*"

"Naw, b' Gawd, he couldn't!" Some miner spoke up. "We got the wrong guy!"

"Aw, le's hang him anyhow. He's a hossthief, they say." Another voice.

"He ain't goin' to hang—*now!*" said Storm Sandell. And the majority agreed. Shucks, to spite that uppity sheriff of Nye—the kinda guy you'd want to drop through a manshaft if he got in your way—they'd let this Smoke Smith right outa jail! A two-gun expert, was he? Well, mighty few men in Soledad wore guns, as a usual thing. There probably would not be any trouble. . . .

BACK at the jail Storm Sandell met Bill Doty, and then shook both hands with the youngster who leaped out of a chair to meet him.

"Smoky—you sure gave me a run!" said the crippled sheriff. He sat down, still holding one of the younger man's hands. "But it's worked out just about perfect."

A knock sounded on the door. Smoke Smith answered, a drawn six-shooter in his hand. But this was not necessary. The interrupter was a badly scared Mexican peon, a youngster.

"I wan' Señor Do-tee," he jabbered. "The hoss—he sen' me——"

Out there, securely tethered to the rail, stood The Weaver!

Smoke Smith came to the door
jingled five silver dollars in his h
went out, stroked the muzzle of t
he loved. Then he clinked the c
the palm of the bug-eyed Pascal, w
had handled one-half that much w
the whole of his nineteen years.

"I take it you like that hoss you
said Bill Doty half humorously,
a shade of envy.

Smoke looked at the under-she
then at Storm, who appeared b
short assistant, and winked. But th
not much mirth in that expression.
the time Smoke had been with Bi
for the first time he had learned
circumstances of his elder brother's
and of the reign of terror which
circled the whole of Soledad Valley

The fact that his uncle, Storm
was sheriff of Soledad, and part o
the despoiled mines, made little di
The law had not been able to cope w
high efficiency of the bandits, or to
the killings and robberies. In th
man who called himself Smoke S
a definite, personal interest, tho
geance and justice must come fir

## CHAPTER IV

### DECOY

THE horse thief's wound cau
little trouble, once he got it
and rebandaged. But he w
released from jail until the after
the following day, when Storm San
peared at the Ace Of Spades with his
announcing that in so far as the ac
of banditry was concerned, Smoke S
alibi held. He could not possib
been present at the holdup in whi
express messenger had been shot.
Soledad County had no interest i
a peccadillo as the theft of a horse
other county. Storm, still grinnin
the way in which the posse of ca
had been compelled to eat buzzard
with the whiskered, morose, looki
tive. And the latter returned the
ment—though many noted that
careful to take the extreme end of
where a solid wall was at his ba
that his hands never strayed very f
his holstered six-shooters.

A dangerous man, was the

Perhaps he would keep right on g, now he was free. Better so.

ome reason Smoke appeared in no depart. He saw to it that The received the finest possible groom- care, with a daily ration of oats. mself he hired one of the four rs in the rear of the Ace Of Spades, nt most of his time either there or about one or another of the g games which flourished in the from dusk until the early morning

ccasional small bet on the wheel was nt of his chance taking. He drank nd gave the impression of not being flush of funds. Once he growled ion to George Small himself, asking r it would be possible for an in- nced man to get a job in one of the Yet when Small apologetically ex- that because of the difficulties in to pay roll and bullion shipments r men were being hired, Smoke grunted and turned away.

rath, his shiftlessness and lack of chability were excellent blinds. he appeared to be dawdling, purpose- bout Soledad, the eyes half hidden those scowling black brows were ting, estimating, cataloguing the ry of Soledad in a manner some of urely would have resented, had they d.

great bulk of the men were rough, h laborers—Swedes, Lithuanians, Irish, with a sprinkling of dis- ted professional hard rock pros- of unknown lineage, who had come region, staked claims, and then gone when the high grade ore was shown imited to a very small sector, already In this sector lay the rich Ponder the moderately good Sandell mine ree lesser shafts. The Ponder miners working. Half a dozen men with s to support were taking their pay centrate from the Sandell mine, tem- y managed by the sheriff and Jerry r. But the other mines were closed the day when gold could go out and minted coin returned with the messenger.

latter still lived, though he was un- us. Word came through, on the ip of the empty stage, that Wells, owing to the unsettled condition of the country, would discontinue service between the rail head and Soledad Valley temporarily.

That news sounded like quietus for the region. A couple of the merchants, less optimistic than the rest, began to pack up their chattels preparatory to moving. The miners idled about uneasily in sullen groups. And among them Smoke Smith dawdled, indifferent. He possessed a horse and a trail outfit. He had nothing to lose if the town went broke.

Yet he heard bald-headed little Jerry Ponder and the company doctor in morose converse. The express messenger would not last out the night, according to the medico; and in spite of restoratives and stimulants, he had not come to consciousness sufficiently to give them any information regarding the bandit gang who had shot him.

"And Jake Peaslee, the damn old skate, won't open his gabe," snapped Jerry. "He must've seen at least one-two of them, the times he's been held up."

"Oh, you can't blame him. I suppose he's got a pretty good notion who some of them are." Thus the red nosed doctor. "But old Jake, with his pegleg, couldn't get any other kind of job. He doesn't wear a gun, and so they let him keep on with his mules and his swaybelly, on the probability that any other driver'd be more dangerous to 'em, I suppose."

Smoke suddenly frowned down at his empty glass. A veil seemed to film over his black eyes. He slouched away from the bar, no one paying him any attention, and out into the darkness. The thin tinkle of a music box playing at one of the Mexican bars came to his ears.

Once away from the lights, and he turned swiftly back to the stable, where the privately owned mules and horses of Soledad were cared for. A smoky lantern burned at the entrance, hung from a peg in the adobe wall.

"Pedro!" called Smoke softly. There was no answer.

"Pedro!" he called more sharply, and stepped forward to the box stall where The Weaver had been ensconced in state. "Damn that lazy *cholo!* Drunk on mescal again, I suppose."

Out of the corner of his eye he saw a shadow detach itself from the murk of a corner where were piled some dusty bales of bluejoint hay, and fling itself toward him!

Smoke's backward leap was involuntary, and a stifled exclamation burst from his lips. His shoulders hit the bar of the stall, throwing his head forward. Quick as the drop of a gopher into its hole, he flung himself sidewise—and none to soon. Naked steel, flung out and upward in the Rio Grande knifing stroke which seeks a man's heart from beneath the floating ribs, missed by a hair! Carried onward and up, it knocked the flat, floppy hat sidewise on his head.

But as the unknown assailant's body came against him, Smoke slapped down one palm upon the butt of his right hand six-shooter, grasping and thumbing the hammer in one motion. The muzzle of the pivoted weapon tilted upward and belched orange fire—once—twice——

That was sufficient. The assassin's body spun away and slumped to the floor. Back of him in a narrow stall a mule squealed and stamped erratically, stung in the tip of one ear by a spent .44 slug which already had traversed a human carcass.

STORM Sandell looked up. He had been swabbing out and oiling one of his pearl handled six-shooters, a gun which had not been fired for nearly a year. The only time Storm had come to grips with the bandits who had become the nightmare of the mine owners and shrievalty, carbines had limited the range. And Storm gritted his teeth, knowing that he had missed. He prayed for a chance at close action with those devils who had slaughtered his nephew and the Wells, Fargo messenger, and the four gunfighters he had asked in to settle the trouble. Just one even-Steven scrap like in the old days, and he would be content to go out. . . .

A man stood there, a bearded, dirty looking specimen who quietly closed the door behind him. It was the horse thief known as Smoke Smith.

"I just killed a Mex, down at the stable. They'd laid out Pedro with a gash on his head. Send the doc down; I think you can pull him through. I left him still bound, because I had to hurry. Now what I want you to do is this. . . ."

And then crisply, his lounging indifference a thing of the past, the bearded, tramplike lounger dictated a succ swift moves to the hobbling, sheriff.

"Why—sure thing, Smoke," Storm slowly. "But what in hell think Bill and me are goin' to see?"

"Yore eyes ain't crippled!" Smoke. "Do jest what I say!"

"All right, boy," agreed the wearily. Yet there was a hopeful the way he holstered his clea gun. In this intricate dilemma of and avarice, who could tell t stranger had not hit upon a me solution?

So it was that within a few after the attempt upon his life, Smith was lounging back in the Spades, apparently carefree. T shots he had fired had been usual in Soledad; no one had bothered vestigate.

The doctor and bald-headed Ponder were still growling away. had taken a table now, and a half bottle of brown glass stood betwee Smoke saw a miner sidle up and s thing to Jerry. A few moments two left the saloon.

About fifteen minutes later Jerr came running back to the bar. bareheaded now, and terrifically He bought a drink, and sloshed i with hands that shook.- And t turned to the men in the bar.

"Listen!" he screamed in hi pitched voice. "Cal Huey, the Fargo man, has *come to!* He's co an' tellin' the sheriff the names of four men he done recognized! N can get after 'em! We'll *get* 'em stay away, till we hear it all! bother the doc! Him an' the she learnin' a lot! T'morrow mornin' askin' for a big posse. All you m ready to take the trail!"

A thunderous shout of gladness a him. Yet all respected old Jerry' mand. Though he got out of there as he could on his bandy legs, the did not try to follow.

But watching from a window, bearded face mingling inextricabl the black shadows, the man kn Smoke Smith saw Bull Muller s himself from his fellows, wander ap aimlessly toward the back door—

pass within six feet of the grim, vengeful man in the black whiskers.

Smoke Smith grinned, but he did not follow. Instead, he reloaded the two fired chambers in one of his revolvers, and then walked over to the small building used as hospital and quarters by the town doctor, the shack wherein a Wells, Fargo messenger just had passed from a coma to the sleep that is everlasting.

Smoke Smith sat down in the deepest murk of shadow, lit a cigaret, and waited. . . .

OUT there, a mile away, Bill Doty, not just aware of what he was supposed to see, but suspecting the nature of it, kept his eyes in the direction of the rim of Magpie Mesa, miles to the southeast.

Right in town, the lame sheriff utilized all of his Indian fighting stealth, and followed the one saloon habitué who seemed ready to quit the scene of mounting excitement for seclusion in his own unlovely shack.

It was Bull Muller, whom Smoke had mentioned, though not revealing any particular basis for suspicion. He had said:

"It mebbe *will* be Bull. I sort of hope so. But it's a cinch somebody'll get scairt. Then watch all hell start to pop!"

Bull sidled along with exaggerated nonchalance, till he was past the lighted saloons, the only illuminated buildings in Soledad now the restaurant had closed. Then, muttering under his breath, he quickened his pace. The shacks down here, all but one, were dark. A faint light shone from a window. The sheriff grimly noted that this single window faced the southeast, and in that direction nothing in the low valley interfered, until the eye reached the rim of the low mesa, invisible now in the blue blackness of a moonless night.

The shack door opened, then banged shut—yet not quite shut. The vigor of Bull's entrance had caused the rude latch to miss. It gaped open again, showing a slender rectangle of yellow light.

Storm reached it unheard by the man inside. Bull was really frightened by the unexpected turn of events. He did not underestimate the ferocity with which his fellow miners would turn upon the real culprits as soon as known. He seized the dim burning lamp, and with fingers that trembled, turned up its wick till it smoked. Then, holding it in the open window, he traced a slow circle, a reverse, several back and forth zigzags. He was even more in awe of the men whose spy he was, and who watched nightly from the mesa for his signal.

"I reckon that'll do for you!" said a grim voice at his back. "Put down that lamp an' reach for the ceiling!"

Storm Sandell had stepped inside, revolver leveled and thumb on the hammer. For a split second Bull Muller held rigid with consternation. But then a spasm of fear and realization smote him. With a shaky scream he jerked the lighted lamp and threw it backward over his shoulder. Then he dove at the black square of the open window.

Though large enough for him to wriggle through, given time, he could not make the exit in a single dive. The sheriff, dodging the fiery projectile, which smashed in broken splinters of glass and licking flames against the log wall, shot once inaccurately. But then he threw down relentlessly a second time, and the heavy slug plowed along the spine of Bull Muller, mushrooming from the impact, and knocking a fearsome hole in the back of his head.

Bull Muller never knew what hit him.

"One of 'em—but a plan sure gone haywire," grimly muttered Storm Sandell, backing out of the doomed cabin after a single glance at his inert victim. "They'll never come now, 'th this torch a-blazing."

He went directly to the spot where Smoke awaited; and there apologetically explained why he had been forced to kill one of the prime suspects, the man from whom they had hoped to wring definite information.

"Well, le's have a drink," shrugged the beared man, not offering any criticism, though it was plain he was disappointed. His plan had been simplicity itself, yet it might have worked. He had trusted just a trifle too much in Storm's sagacity, not imagining that the sheriff would attempt an arrest under any such circumstances. "You done what you saw best, Storm, and I ain't blaming you. We'll get 'em."

"Nevertheless an' notwithstanding," rejoined the contrite Storm, who saw only too clearly now that his action had been precipitate. "I'm buying, an' saying not a damn word!"

## CHAPTER V

### FIRE WITH FIRE

THE Ace Of Spades was a riot of sound when they returned. No one in the place had heard Storm's two revolver shots. The miners had found out that Doc Saltmarsh had left his ex-patient, the Wells, Fargo messenger, and had promptly hunted him out at his shack, where the red nosed medico was seated with a new quart of Old Taylor Bourbon and a battered Washburn tenor mandolo. Thus fixed for the latter part of the evening, he would jiggle the worn celluloid pick with the keen skill of a glee club soloist, twinkle the long slender fingers of his left hand in six positions—and drink. After a while the dexterous finger-twinkle would gradually disappear; likewise the surety of the pick. Doc would be reduced to chords, of which he had a mellifluous variety. And then, too, he would sing.

Despite the fact that he was half seas over, and more, the doctor remembered a glimmer of the agreed upon plan, and had no idea that it had miscarried. He obstinately refused to tell what he had learned about the robbers from Cal Huey, before the express messenger's death. That talk would have to come from old Jerry Ponder or Storm Sandell, if it came at all.

Threats, persuasion, rough eloquence—all were futile. The medico really had nothing to divulge, of course, and so he could stick to his original statement. He did more than that. Right when the prolonged argument threatened to take a sinister slant—choking him at the end of a rope for a minute or two, perhaps—the doc took another drink. And promptly went to sleep.

Disgruntled, savage and aimless, the miners filed back to the Ace Of Spades. Except for the two Mexican cantinas, all other resorts had closed; even the bartenders and owners mingled with the throng in George Small's place. There was much angry talk, but nothing done. The sheriff unaccountably had disappeared. Even the bald-headed little Jerry Ponder did not know—or now said he did not know—where Storm had vanished.

But now an ominous figure slipped into the crowd and gained the end of the bar unnoted. It was the unkempt blackbeard, Smoke Smith, limping a little and looking more disreputable than ever. His battered felt was ripped from an upward stroke of a knife; a portion of the rim hung as a limp bangle over his left ear. Without deigning a word of explanation he shoved aside bottles and glasses, and climbed atop the marred cherry bar. Then he dropped both hands to the butts of his revolvers.

*"Men!"* His voice rang deep with a sort of a raucous arrogance which cut through the vapid roar of purposeless discussion. Halting silence came. Two hundred, two hundred thirty, two hundred forty pairs of eyes, turned surprisedly to him—and held. Up there, in the half crouch of the gunfighter and killer, stood the man they knew as Smoke Smith—dirty, clad in an outfit even an Indian would have scorned, yet compelling, withal. What the hell?

"I ain't a miner," he continued when the last buzz of conversation subsided. "Coming here, I didn't owe Mister and Miz Soledad County one damn thing. At first, that was. I was on my own and paying for what I used. Now I'm just about broke.

"Yore sheriff is a square guy. He did me a mighty good turn. I like him. So I'm going to help him out—mebbe a whole lot; mebbe not so much. I didn't ever bother to say anything about how Mister Doty captured me, when he was after those other fellas. But this is the way it was."

And then Smoke Smith sketched for them a semi-truthful narrative of how he had accidentally fallen into the clutches of the outlaws, been partially stunned by a rap on the head, and then shot through the calf of one leg—so that he would be mistaken for that one of the outlaws wounded by Bill Doty, under-sheriff.

"So they let me live, hoping to set you-all off on the wrong trail," said Smoke, concluding. "One of the bandits was called Slim. He was the one with the hole in his leg. And he. . . ."

Tersely he related all he had been able to observe of the five men in the outlaw band. And, as it had been registered in his mind from listening to voices, and from a meteoric flight from the rimrock to the trail ledge below, it was by no means complete. Yet the names he mentioned started a wondering buzz of conversation in little groups scattered all over the barroom. Evidently the nicknames he had overheard were well known in Soledad!

"And *now!*" Smoke Smith again called for attention from the multitude. "Now I aim to elect myself to a job! You-all got a stage driver, but no express agent. All right, I got to work if I aim to eat right along from now on. I'm going to be express messenger—*one* way, and that's outa here with the next bullion or concentrate, or whatever it is you ship. And I'll get it to Caton! If Wells, Fargo hires me, I'll bring back two-three pay rolls, according to what's wanted. I guarantee—with my life! I ain't so much eddicated, but I can shoot. Anybody around who owns these-here mines?"

A big blond man, the thirty-five year old Svend Strom, and bandy legged, seventy year old Jerry Ponder crashed over a table and half a quart of special reserve whisky, as they leaped up to answer. Jerry pushed and shoved forward, then jumped like an agile monkey to the bar. He yanked out a leather wallet from the left hip pocket of his worn corduroys.

"I call yuh!" he shouted above the tumult. "They's about three thousand dollars in there!" He slapped the leather wallet with the back of his hairy hand. "All yore's if you take me two shipments out an' two pay rolls in!"

The black beard parted in what possibly was a smile.

"Nothing doing, old man," said Smoke with easy going disdain. "What the hell'd I do with that much money? Nope. I'll take a hundered fifty a month, and a room here at the Ace Of Spades any times I'm back. I don't aim to sit aboard a stage more'n two-three weeks, or mebbe a month. By that time I oughta have the hombres you want—unless they've got scairt, and gone from here with what they stole. A-course I won't turn down the reg'lar rewards, if I get 'em. In case they do for me like they done for the others, my room and board in hell comes right inexpensive and peaceful. I won't object none to speak of. . . ."

There was more, drawled out. Yet Soledad failed to notice one strange item, the bearded gunman twice or thrice had lapsed into speech pleasantly modulated and less glaringly ignorant in diction than he used at other times.

So it was arranged. And then occurred a succession of mysterious conferences between Jerry, the blond and silent Strom, the sheriff, Bill Doty, and Smoke Smith. Nothing was said in public about these; yet every miner in Soledad knew that these men were planning a surprise trip with perhaps one hundred pounds of accumulated gold concentrate.

And meanwhile, hoping, doubting, the miners, most of them returned to work in desultory fashion. Though the word of Smoke Smith was considered a dubious article of testimony, still it was that all of Soledad watched and waited for the possible visit of one of the five men named and described by the horsethief express guard. All of these new suspects had been in the habit of coming into Soledad occasionally. They posed as lone prospectors, more or less down on their luck. Why, the two known as Black Murph and Tonopah Tom had even possessed the consummate brass to beg grubstakes from George Small and his chief bartender, Blue Blazer Aitkins!

Well, let them come in just once more! Soledad was waiting for them!

Somehow it came to pass, however, that none of them did come. Which was exactly what Smoke Smith's canny plans had hoped to bring about.

WITH an appearance of striving for the utmost secrecy, Smoke rode forth on the stage beside the pegleg driver, Jake Peaslee, one morning before dawn. The venture was thoroughly known and discussed, albeit in whispers, by the entire town of Soledad over various morning's morning. At least a hundred pounds of ninety per cent gold had gone out from the Ponder group and the Sandell mine. Nearly two hundred thousand dollars—the richest prize ever flaunted in the faces of the outlaw gang!

Prophecies were gloomy. The gold would not get through; too many people knew about it, and certainly the bandits had sources of information right here in town. This, in spite of the fact that Storm Sandell had said not a word about his killing Bull Muller. Shrewd opinion had it that Bull had been drunk enough to upset his lamp, which he always kept burning. Trying to get out through the window, where his charred corpse had been found, he had been overcome and roasted.

But as it came about, a bearded, thuglike individual, gripping a sawed-off shotgun, and wearing two revolvers, actually rode the swaybelly coach into Hartnett, Nevada, climbed down stiffly, and watched while old pegleg Jake carried two small heavy boxes into the express offices, and got two signed receipts.

No one interfered. Hartnett had its own worries. Next day the First National Bank delivered to Smoke Smith—now an accredited employee of Wells, Fargo, as well as of the mines back in Soledad—two tight buckled canvas bags containing about $63,000 in paper, gold and silver. Most of the weight was in gold, since paper still was viewed with suspicion by all but a few employees of the mines.

And, eighteen hours later, the stage drew up before the sheriff's office in Soledad. Storm Sandell was there, a Winchester .30-30 in his hands, to welcome his pet outlaw with what might have seemed a suspicious effusiveness, had anyone been watching and analyzing. But Soledad, paid off in gold coin to date, only wanted to celebrate—and to buy drinks for the stand-offish lone wolf who had accomplished what even professional gunmen en masse had failed to do.

Smoke Smith only yawned. He drank thrice, with Jerry Ponder, Bill Doty, and Storm, and then bought a last round himself. Then he dragged off, patently exhausted, and went to bed in his back room.

"He says nothing *a*-tall happened!" Jerry explained in his shrill voice. "Both ways he made it an' no ruckus. Mebbe them jiggers has left us be!"

That was the story Soledad was forced to accept. But Jerry, and the trembling senile pegleg, Jake Peaslee, knew vastly different. And Jerry would keep his ideas under his hat. Jake would, too. Jake had become even more frightened of that villainous confrère, Smoke Smith, than he was of the outlaw gang. Smoke had overpowered Jake just as soon as they were out of sight of Soledad, carried the old man to an ant hill, and there let a few of the fire ants bite him.

If Jake did not say and do exactly what Smoke Smith decreed, he would be bound and left on such an ant hill! He would be nothing but cleaned bones and a wooden leg in the course of twenty-four hours!

That was the reason Jake said nothing concerning the fact that five miles out of Soledad Smoke Smith had transferred the gold to saddle bags, and then had gone into the chaparral and brought back his famous stolen horse, The Weaver. Or that fifteen miles further along Jake had been held up as usual, but had told the bandits, shaking in his single shoe, that this was only a sort of stall; that the gold was routed along another way. . . .

Or that on the return journey the tactics had been duplicated successfully, the bandits fooled.

No, Jake said nothing of this; but he ardently wished that he *never* had put himself in the power of a tyrant like this filthy, bearded customer, Smoke Smith!

"I was right for once!" boasted Jerry Ponder, that evening. "Honest men ain't that clever. Yuh gotta set a thief to beat a thief. An' now any time this jigger Smoke Smith wants suthin', give it to him! I'll foot the bills!"

## CHAPTER VI

### BLOOD STAINS ON GRANITE

THREE slow weeks went by. Smoke Smith played a little California draw poker. He drank perhaps twice a day. Otherwise he repulsed all efforts of the enthusiastic miners. He even ate alone. By and by Soledad gave him up. He looked as though he would be the savings of all of them, but he was too cold-blooded for any sort of friendship.

Little they knew! Just once Smoke Smith had gone secretly and alone to Soledad's cemetery, apart from the ignominious boot hill. At one of the eight graves of those Soledad had honored with something more than a pine coffin and a quick interment, Smoke had bent and touched the rude wooden cross which bore the name of his brother, Robert Sandell.

That was all. Yet when Smoke came away there was a misty eyed exultance of promise, a surety of vengeance delivered, which might well have caused five bronzed cheeks to pale!

There came another trip into Hartnett, this time without gold. And a return trip was made without a pay roll, and without any disturbance. It seemed as Smoke had guessed all along, that the bandits possessed means of knowing just when a raid would be most profitable, and when it would glean nothing.

Another week of idleness, and then a whole month's concentrate was ready to go from the Ponder and Sandell mines, and more than that from the others in the district. Everyone in Soledad realized that this time the greatest coup of all was in order! About three hundred thousand dollars' worth of gold concentrate was ready to go! Could Smoke Smith take it through as he had done the last time? Bets were made, and the betting did not favor him, despite the fact that he had succeeded on a round trip once before. No one placed any credence in Smoke's easy shrug and statement that he believed the bandits gone.

Finally the ancient Concord coach creaked out of the dusty main street of Soledad, before dawn, as was the usual schedule. Up on the seat was old Jake, nearly petrified with terror at the ordeal he faced. Beside him lounged the man he feared even more than the murderous bandits. Smoke Smith laughed raucously at the thought of danger. The bandits had left Soledad, of course; they were afraid of his marksmanship. To hell with worrying about them!

That sort of boasting comforted Jake not at all. He, for one, was well aware that the bandits had not left. So when five miles out, Smoke bade him stop, and thereupon brought up a strange figure from the chaparral, instead of the horse he had used previously, Jake whined and gibbered. For the first time he would have to consent to be a party to a deception of the outlaws; and this would mean his life was forfeit.

Yet Smoke Smith only snarled at him. What was Jake's tenuous hold on life worth, anyway? In the end, Jake caved, of course. One bullet would be a lot easier than the shocking demise of the ant hill. . . .

Where the road wound through a cut, and then snaked uphill on a long slant, the holdup occurred without warning. Three posted riflemen saw the limp, bearded figure beside old Jake. Like a damned fool Smoke Smith seemingly had gone to sleep. The three men with rifles stood up and aimed carefully; they did not want to hurt old Jake, for a very good reason.

A whistle shrilled. Down there in the road two men scampered up and aimed rifles. They shot. From the sides three others shot. Old Jake yelled his terror, as the figure beside him, holding a shotgun, slumped sidewise and fell over the wheel without a sign of life.

"Just another one, boys!" yelled the leader, Tonopah Tom. "Go get it!"

Three men came down from the low ledges. Another approached from in front of the stage. They closed in, easy and confident.

But then something happened—something decidedly not in the cards! The bearded figure down on the granite road had not moved after the first volley. Yet, from the curved top of the stagecoach came a shot—two—three—four! A clean shaven, young looking man had come to his knees from a prone position along the ceiling of the coach. And at his shots one after another of the bandits crumpled or fell twitching!

Only the leader was left. He fired; but the bullet chipped the top of the Concord coach as the man with six-shooters leaped to the ground and ran forward.

Another shot from the rifle, and the clean shaven man stopped suddenly. One of his arms, holding a six-gun, now dangled uselessly. Yet he brought up the other weapon, aimed, and shot!

Out on the trail, forty feet distant, a man with a rifle swayed and toppled forward to the rock, a bullet through his breastbone.

Then it was that the unknown, who had just killed five of his own humankind, faltered, grinned—and sat down.

"Reckon yo're all—all clear now—nothin'—scairt of—" he said to pegleg Jake Peaslee, who was coming forward fearfully, unbelieving what his eyes had seen. And then the smooth shaven man leaned over quietly and went to sleep.

BACK in Soledad old Jake enjoyed what was near an hour of triumph. All five of the bandits were dead, and they were the men named earlier by the horsethief, Smoke Smith! He had killed them, but old Jake had helped. Just how he had helped, Jake did not state, but he got a fraction of the glory just the same.

And four days later he received $2,750 in gold, which was exactly one-half of the amount posted in rewards for the gang. Jake bubbled and grinned his thankfulness—and went forthwith to buy an orange grove in California, for his old age. It is to be presumed that he succeeded, if only to the extent of a few acres. Orange land was not very expensive in those days.

The rest of it was not so easy to ditch. Storm Sandell, of course, brought in the dummy figure which had sat alongside Jake on the stagecoach ride. The dummy's breast and head were perforated by five bullets, and much of the figure's straw brains had been lost in the fall from the coach.

Yet up there at Svend Strom's home, where Jerry's daughter and Jerry himself, to say nothing of Bill Doty and the sheriff, Storm Sandell, took care of a wounded man who now sported a clean shave and a rough haircut, the man who had been known as Smoke Smith, the horsethief, grinned quietly and took his ease.

"Tell 'em all about it," he bade Storm.

The sheriff got an audience a few hours later, after some drinks which Storm himself bought for the house.

"Y'see, this Smoke Smith is really my nevvy," said Storm. "After those hombres killed his brother I wrote him, and asked him if he didn't wanta come in an' help me out. I was up against it. So we got Chub Lennon—he's shurff of Nye—to kinda assist. Lennon acted like he hated miners. Remember that? He really don't, matter of fact. He's a good fella. An' he done what I asked.

"Smoke never stole any hoss. His name is Smoke Sandell, an' he's the guy who now owns most of the Sandell mine! I ain't but a figurehead; he's the boss!"

But at the Strom home, Smoke had a a good deal to say for himself. Jerry Ponder was there, and so was Storm Sandell.

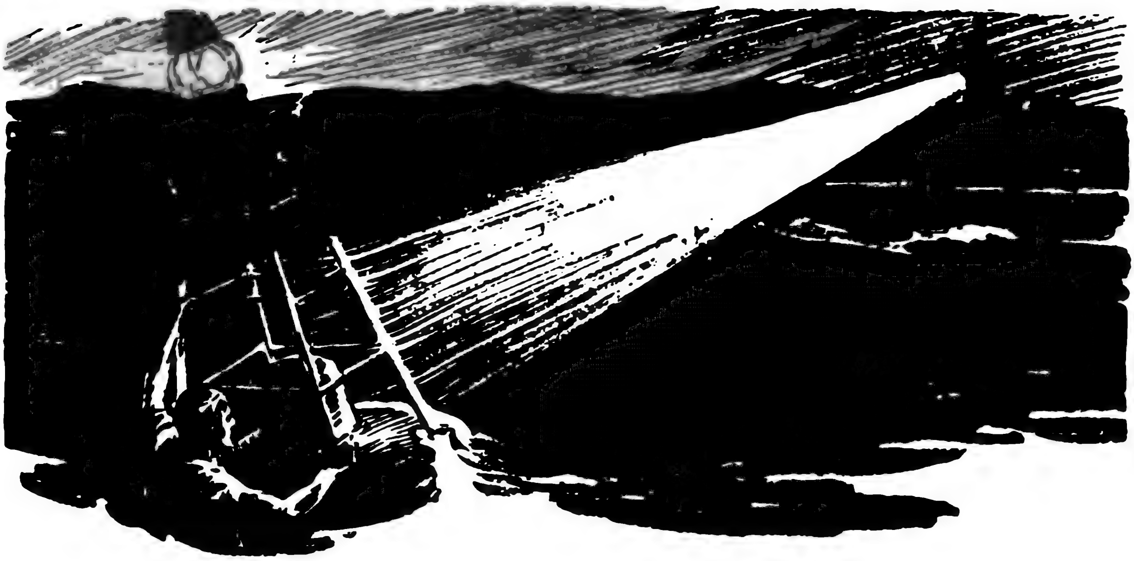
"I'm not going to take over the mine," said Smoke, smiling up at the two serious men. "Shucks, I don't know gold from copper! Back there in Demijohn Valley I been working for old Lobo Lange. I got a maverick brand of my own, mebbe two-three hundred cows by now, since I been taking half my wages in calves."

"But you're Bob's heir. You gotta!" said Storm.

"Gotta what?" snapped the invalid. "Me, I'm a cowman, not a miner. You, Storm, I reckon yo're a mine owner, not a sheriff! S'pose we trade—part way? You go ahead with our mine. Now you own half of it, 'stead of a quarter. And yo're manager—say you and I pay you five thousand a year. Bill Doty'll make a damn good sheriff, I'd say. How about it, Storm?" His hand came out.

Storm Sandell clasped it. Of a sudden he felt old; but that now did not make any difference. This young son of his beloved sister had proved up as the best man thus far of the Sandell strain. Well, Storm was kinda content. Let the young buck have his cattle ranch, if he wanted it. Let Bill Doty have the sheriff's shield; he'd really earned it. Let the miners get back to business, with their pay assured.

But wasn't it just too darned bad that a real jigger like Smoke wanted to waste his time on cattle?



# THE Q BUOY

## *The Story of a Momentous Tropic Night*

### By MILLARD WARD

BILL JOHNSON, from the bow of the auxiliary schooner *Miramar*, picked up a faint, uneven line of violet above the sea horizon ahead, and wandered leisurely aft.

"Land ho, Duke," he reported. " 'Bout a point on the stabbord bow. Looks like Cape Roca."

Captain Chenoweth nodded and put the wheel down a spoke or two. When the schooner was steadied on her new course, farther off shore, he could see the violet line himself.

"It's Roca, all right," he said. "The coast from now on will be San Lorenzo. We ought to make San Lorenzo City tomorrow or next day."

Bill lighted a cigaret and regarded the burnt match shrewdly.

"Wonder what we're goin' to find when we get there."

Chenoweth's eyes were on the high, white sails, smooth and rounded with the southerly breeze.

"Probably nothing much. It's only a couple of weeks since Rosalva broke jail down there. He'll hardly have had time to get his gang together yet."

"Can't tell, Duke. Rosy is a fast worker. He can get a revolution goin' quicker'n most men can a pipe. I'm glad we're goin' to be there when the fun begins."

The captain glanced down approvingly at his white shirt and duck trousers.

"Rather. I've had enough of March weather in New York anyway."

"Me, too. Don Manuel may be surprised to see us, but we can't stand by and let Rosalva boost him out of the president's job we helped him into. Don Manuel's a fine old man and his son, Don Jaime's a good soldier, but they ain't quite mean enough to handle Rosy."

Chenoweth grinned.

"Take's us for that, huh? Let's see, now. It's about twelve miles from Roca to the gas buoy at the entrance to Villanueva Harbor and a hundred and fifty from there to the breakwater at San Lorenzo. Hum! We've never been into Villanueva, have we?"

"Nope, and I don't care if we never go. I'll sail the extra hundred and fifty miles to get to the capital."

"San Lorenzo has always had more in

the way of amusement," admitted Chenoweth. "Ever since the Spanish gold trains used to meet their galleons there, but in this modern world you can't afford to overlook places like Villanueva. Do you know that about three quarters of the country's trade goes on through there? Where do the railroads from the banana plantations run to? Where do the fruit steamers call? From what port are all the farm implements, machinery, textiles and what not distributed? And last, but by a long shot not least, where is the sea terminal for those new oil companies going to be? The answer, in one word, is Villanueva."

Bill looked impressed.

"I always heard Villanueva had a rotten harbor, though?"

"Well, right now San Lorenzo is better. But San Lorenzo's about as good as it can ever be—a lot of permanent sea walls, breakwaters and so on—while Villanueva, being long and irregular and open, can be improved to almost any extent. That's why the big companies put their money there. Also it's closer to the United States and easier to reach by either land or water."

"That's the place used to be Rosalva's headquarters. Not so, Duke?"

"Uh-huh. That's where he raised most of the last two armies we fought against, but now I hear the people are getting rich so fast, with Don Manuel as president, they don't feel they have time to bother with Rosy any more. Anything he does this time, he'll have to do mostly with foreigners, I think. Wonder if he really will have another shot at a revolution."

"I don't know, Duke, but I do know I'm beginnin' to get sick of four on and four off."

"Me, too. And a couple of times it's been four on and stay on. Still, it's a good trip. The plaza in San Lorenzo under a full moon, with the band playing and a long, cold glass at your elbow won't go so bad, huh, Bill?"

The engineer smiled beatifically.

"That's livin'. Seein' General Don Jaime and all the old campaigners, too. Been sometime since we were down here."

Chenoweth held a spoke of the wheel under his knee while he lighted his pipe, and the *Miramar* slipped on quietly, the shadow of her sails reaching farther and farther across the calm water.

JUST before sunset, when the blue of the sea had begun to fade into gray and saffron, Chenoweth made out another vessel far up on the port bow. He reached back, took a pair of binoculars from a box on the taffrail, and leveled them at the stranger. She appeared to be a two masted schooner about the same size as the *Miramar* but with badly cut, almost rectangular sails and a long, awkward bowsprit. From her course, which would eventually cross that of the *Miramar,* she was bound into the port of Villanueva.

Chenoweth found that the wheel needed little attention and he shifted the glasses to the coast of San Lorenzo, now rising high and dark out of the sea to starboard. Almost abeam were two promontories which he judged from the chart marked the entrance to Fuego Bay, a wide, shallow body of water bordered north and south by swamps, and on the inner side by an abrupt range of desert hills.

Farther down the coast, Point Coria, at the mouth of Villanueva harbor, stood out ruggedly against the sunset aureoled mountains beyond it. Through the steady glasses Chenoweth could make out the tall red sea buoy just outside the point, and, lying motionless a short distance from it, another craft which puzzled him.

It was a narrow, gray vessel, very low in the water with a deckhouse rising sharply amidships. It looked small and not particularly formidable. The *Miramar* was heading well outside the buoy, but Chenoweth decided to take another look when it came abeam.

The other schooner, meanwhile, was passing across the *Miramar's* bows, more than a mile ahead. Chenoweth, observing her slow progress, grinned complacently.

"Give us five miles on the same course with that skipper and we'd leave him out of sight."

Bill nodded.

"He hasn't got the boat we have. Still, he's almost home now. He'll be inside the buoy in a few minutes."

"What do you make of that other fellow lying just off the buoy, Bill?"

"That little gray fellow? Damn if I know. I'd say it was a bum boat except for the house amidships. Lemme have the glasses on her."

When the engineer replaced the binoculars in their box he still looked uncertain.

"Don't help much. Getting hazy in there."

An instant later there was a vivid flash from the deck of the gray stranger, followed by a loud, metallic report. The other schooner came up suddenly into the wind and hung there, her sails fluttering. Chenoweth reached the binoculars first.

"Must have fired across her bows. There's men on the deck of the gray one," he reported after a moment. "And a three inch gun! Sure as hell. She's swung around now so you can see it. Crew of the schooner are piling into their tender. Only four of 'em . . . There, they're clear. You can see that yourself, can't you? Lord, Bill, it's a submarine!"

On the heels of his words came another brilliant flash and both men saw wreckage fly from the abandoned schooner. Her foremast sagged far over to port and lay just clear of the water, held by its tangled gear.

"Stand by the main sheet, Bill," said Chenoweth in an abrupt, restrained voice, "We're going away from here."

While they were busy with helm and sheets, another shot came from the submarine, and when the *Miramar* was steadied on her northern course, with the breeze on her starboard quarter, both men looked back.

The sun had disappeared suddenly behind the mountains to the westward and the coast lay in cool, blue shadow. Only a faint blur beyond the flashing of the sea buoy remained of the submarine, and the strange schooner had disappeared altogether.

Bill whistled softly.

"I'm not sorry he beat us down there after all, Duke."

"Submarine! Rosalva's, sure as hell. Blockading Villanueva. What the devil can he want?"

"If it is Rosalva," replied the engineer, "he probably wants money. How can he raise a foreign army without money? Villanueva used to keep him supplied, but now that they quit him, I bet he's got hold of an old U-boat somewhere and is goin' to take it from 'em."

"Piracy, huh! Oh, damn! Oh, damn! And we can't do anything but run away. That place is as good as undefended, but I wish we were in there anyway. Something might be done. The old *Trinidad* is back in commission, I heard, but she couldn't possibly get up steam and make 150 miles in less than twelve hours. That submarine can knock the devil out of the place all night if he wants to."

The slight leeway the *Miramar* had been making had carried her close inshore and a few minutes later a turn in the coast blotted out both buoy and submarine.

Bill sighed deeply.

"Well, he won't get us now, anyhow. Lucky he didn't take a notion to run us down."

Chenoweth looked grim.

"Didn't take us long to strike something of interest, did it? I sure as hell wish we were in Villanueva. Some kind of defense ought to be possible."

"You said that before, Duke. It ain't like you to repeat yourself. Is there any way of gettin' in there?"

Chenoweth stared, then smiled tautly.

"Take the wheel while I look at the chart."

He was back from the cabin in less than five minutes.

"We can do it, Bill. That point over there—you can't see it, it's on the other side of the sail, but it's there—is at the mouth of Fuego Bay. We can leave the schooner in there, go ashore in that little boat we got stowed amidships—tender draws too much for marshes—and haul the boat over those hills about half a mile to a branch of the river that flows right past Villanueva."

Bill walked forward without any words and began letting go the lashings of the boat. Chenoweth watched him for a moment, then swung the schooner's head into Fuego Bay.

AN HOUR later, weary, scratched, covered with insect bites and muddy to the waist after the long, dark portage, the two men heaved their tiny boat into the stream that flowed past Villanueva. After that the current bore them on effortlessly. There was a feel and weight rather than sight of foliage along the banks and overhead, while sometimes a thin scampering in the undergrowth seemed almost beneath the gunwale of the boat.

At last, when a turn in the channel had nearly carried them ashore and Chenoweth had pulled clear hastily; a smell of mud flats uncovered by tide, broke through the heavy forest air. Chenoweth trailed oars and stared ahead intently. The night had changed subtly, and was filled with the soundless rustle, the dead black color of invisible, living people. But there was no light anywhere.

The captain's voice sounded low and plaintive.

"Where the hell are we now? Villanueva ought to be in plain sight. I feel it. And damn if I don't think I smell it, too, but I don't see it. Ought to be lights. Can't be much past nine o'clock."

"Maybe they don't show any lights because of that submarine," suggested Bill. "Does seem like we've come far enough."

Chenoweth took a few tentative strokes toward the eastern bank and turned to look again. A dim white light just above the water had come into sight almost abeam and, with a satisfied growl, he turned the boat's bow for it. The pale sides of buildings on piles above the river loomed suddenly close on either hand and a few yards ahead a man stood waiting beside the light. As Chenoweth came neatly alongside a low landing stage and leaped ashore with the bow painter, this man took a step forward and presented an unsheathed bayonet attached to the end of a rifle.

*"Halte! Quien va?"*

It was an immediate threat rather than a question. Chenoweth stood still and replied in Spanish:

"Friends of the president. We wish to see the commandant of the garrison here."

The sentry looked unfriendly.

"Step up, then, both into the light."

Bill Johnson came ashore and stood by the captain's side. At sight of his big body, strong face and flaming red hair, the soldier stared incredulously, then came smartly to port arms.

"Señores, pass where you like. It must be forgiven me that I did not recognize the señores at once."

Chenoweth relaxed.

"Know us, do you?"

"I had the honor to be present," replied the sentry, "when the señores were decorated by the president last year."

"Piece o' luck," said Bill Johnson. "Who's in command here, anyhow, buddy?"

"General Don Jaime de Morgante. He arrived from San Lorenzo yesterday to plan a stronger defense for this city. Then came this submarine and with less than a hundred men and no artillery Bolivar himself could do nothing."

"Where is General de Morgante now?"

"At no great distance from here. Apparently it will not be taken amiss if I guide you myself."

Within ten minutes the two seamen were in the general's temporary headquarters, a large room on the first floor of a house near the middle of the city. The general himself, a thin, dark, surprisingly young man, with a precise and pointed mustache, broke away with an exclamation of wonder from the knot of men in civilian clothes to whom he had been talking, and held out both hands.

"My good friends! Have you dropped from Mars?"

The seamen grinned as they took his hands.

"The canals of Mars, Don Jaime, to judge by our appearance," replied Chenoweth.

"Your appearance is very fortunate," Don Jaime declared strongly. "One moment and we will talk."

When the civilians had departed with downcast faces, the general drew up chairs about his desk and the three officers seated themselves tensely.

Chenoweth told in a few words how he and Bill came there. When he concluded, Don Jaime nodded grimly.

"You know nearly all, then. It is simple piracy. Rosalva demands a million gold pesos before midnight or he will shell Villanueva. We have been surprised. We are not prepared to resist but we cannot pay the money. Rosalva will not believe this and promises to level the city. I have just been talking to a committee of citizens. I advised them to take their families and valuables away, anywhere, the bare shore if necessary, before midnight. Villanueva is here now but by morning—*pouf!*" Don Jaime made an expressive gesture with his hands and fell silent.

"Have you sent for the Federal cruiser, the *Trinidad*, Don Jaime," demanded Chenoweth anxiously.

"A wire four hours ago," replied the soldier. "She cannot arrive before daybreak."

"And there is no artillery for defense?"

"None. To keep the city dark is all we can do."

"But airplanes, Don Jaime. Are the three English aviators not in Don Manuel's army now?"

Don Jaime flushed and at the same time half smiled.

"No, Captain. They departed a month ago. We had no trained mechanicians and they, having been English officers, would not take the necessary care of their own planes. The planes are still in San Lorenzo but there is no one there who can fly them."

All three were silent for a period of minutes, Chenoweth staring hard at his frayed and muddy shoes. At last he raised his head.

"Can a man make his way through the marsh on the other side of the river, Don Jaime?"

"Not on foot, in boat, perhaps."

Chenoweth sprang up excitedly; his eyes were aglow with a light of inspiration.

"Then, while the city is dark, can't we take lighted lanterns into that marsh, hang them from sticks and leave them there? I saw on the chart that a headland on the south shore of the river hides actual sight of the city from the sea. Won't the submarine commander be likely to spend the night firing at the glow of the lights in the marsh?"

Don Jaime half rose also, his eyes flashing, then sank back dejectedly.

"No, Captain, it would not deceive them. They would be distrustful of lights that appeared after hours of darkness. Moreover, the chart gives them a perfect range for the city. The sea buoy and the headland of which you spoke are exactly in line with the city. The headland is high and in open country and will be visible against the sky on even so dark a night as this. They will not fire at lights that do not line up with the buoy and headland."

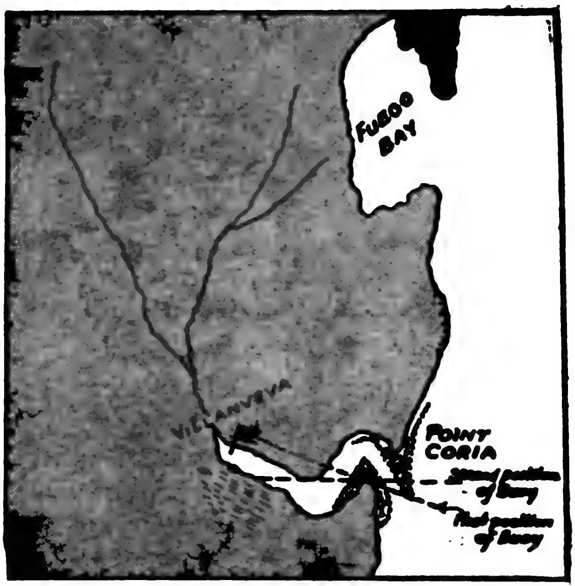
Chenoweth stayed on his feet.

"Have you a chart here, Don Jaime?"

The officer bent to a leather case beside his chair, brought out a stiff white paper and spread it on top of the desk.

"You may see for yourself," he said, proferring it to the captain.

The part of the chart which particularly interested Chenoweth appeared roughly as follows:



All three studied it closely. After a minute Chenoweth's eyes jerked up again.

"We can't move the headland very well, but perhaps we can move the buoy."

Don Jaime seemed puzzled.

"It would be difficult, but even if possible, why should we?"

Chenoweth found a pencil and straight edge and drew a line from the buoy tangent to the point of the headland. It cut through the heart of the city.

"The headland, you see, is much closer to the buoy than to the city. A difference of a hundred yards or so in the position of the buoy would throw the indicated position of the city a half mile out. Thus."

He made a cross on the chart a short distance inshore from the buoy. A line from the cross tangent to the southern point missed the city entirely and passed through the middle of the swamp on the other side of the river.

"There. You see. It is better than my first plan. If it is done with care it cannot rouse suspicion. Even if he notices the difference in compass bearing he will blame it on deviation, he being so near shore."

The desk bounced beneath Don Jaime's lean fist and the points of his mustache curled sharply upward.

"It is inspiration! But how can the buoy be moved? The submarine was last reported close in, patrolling the harbor mouth."

Chenoweth sat down again, abruptly.

"It will need some plans . . . How long have we till midnight?"

Don Jaime glanced at his wrist watch.

"Nearly two hours."

"Good. If we could get a line fast to the anchor chain of the buoy, some distance below the surface, is there an engine anywhere around strong enough to drag the anchor toward shore?"

"There is a heavy tractor at the fruit pier. It is new and I have heard people speak of it with wonder. It would move the buoy but first would break any line short of a steel cable."

"Well," said Chenoweth briefly. "Have you got a steel cable, one with a hook?"

Don Jaime's eyes widened.

"Surely. But how is it to be fastened under the very guns of the submarine? A boat would be fired upon at sight."

"Means business, huh?"

"So the commander's message to us declared. No vessel of any sort to pass in or out. You yourselves observed the fate of a schooner."

"So we did. Still, I think I can get you a wire to that chain not far from the bottom of the water. That way it won't bounce the buoy around too much. We've got to bring her in without them seeing her move, you know."

Don Jaime nodded calmly.

"I ask for no more details. Your orders shall be obeyed. It would be better to lose no time."

A ROAD, which was scarcely more than a trail through the hills, led from Villanueva down to Point Coria on the north side of the harbor, and within half an hour the three officers, together with the tractor, Don Jaime's automobile, a half mile of wire rope, and a dozen picked soldiers from the city's tiny garrison were gathered in a low valley, so close to the sea that the reflection of the big buoy's flashing was visible against low hanging clouds rolled up by the easterly breeze. The soldiers huddled together uncertainly while Don Jaime, Chenoweth and Johnson, a little distance away, talked in restrained voices.

Soon, in accordance with Chenoweth's orders, the whole party moved out of the valley on foot, hauling with them one end of the wire rope into which a large steel hook had been spliced. Bill Johnson carried a coil of light manila line slung over one shoulder.

The tide was low, exposing a strip of fairly even gravel at the foot of the north point, along which the men could make their way. The clear, quiet voice of ripples along the river bank and the soft slithering of the cable over sand were lost presently in the heavy breathing of waves on the sea beach ahead. The light of the big gas buoy was in plain sight, perhaps six hundred yards off shore.

At the end of the point of land Chenoweth halted and the soldiers set to work methodically to haul in the wire cable and coil it down. There could be no question of light to work by, and the hard coils reared and bucked viciously, scarcely one yielding without a struggle.

Chenoweth and Bill stood side by side, with the wash of the waves almost at their feet, and stared out past the buoy. A single light showed in the darkness, moving slowly across the harbor mouth, a spot of white, sinister and dim.

Bill slipped the big coil of line from his shoulder and began unbuttoning his shirt. While he was undressing, Chenoweth put a bowknot in the end of the line. Bill had not been wearing many clothes, so in less than a minute he stood stark naked on the beach, his body shining in ghostly fashion.

He took the loop of line from Chenoweth's hands, slung it over his head and left shoulder, and walked down to the edge of the water. A wave broke and came pouring about his feet in a smooth sweep of foam. Bill looked back at Chenoweth and Don Jaime, six feet behind him.

"Warm as steam, boys. Keep that line clear and we'll be all set."

He turned again, waded strongly forward, dived through a breaking sea, his body suddenly black against the pale foam, and was gone.

On a common impulse, Chenoweth and Don Jaime squatted; one on each side of the coil of line and watched it solicitously as it writhed out. It was a new stuff, four strand, a quarter of an inch in diameter, strong but dry enough to float and not too heavy. It would hamper Bill seriously, Chenoweth knew, before he reached the buoy; but Bill was a remarkable swimmer. The slow movement of the coil was infinitely comforting. It meant, as minutes passed, that Bill, alone in a wide, very black sea, was still all right.

Presently, one of the soldiers came and reported that the wire was ready.

"We'll have to buoy it up some way as we pay it out," Chenoweth decided. "I can't drag six hundred yards of it along the bottom."

Don Jaime considered.

"If we tied logs at intervals, that would serve?"

"Yes; but it will need a good many. More than we can pick up on the beach."

Don Jaime raised a reassuring hand.

"There are ties for the narrow gauge railway at the banana pier. I will send Sergeant Gomez in my automobile. If the springs break, they break in a good cause."

When the sergeant had received his orders and departed, Chenoweth and Don Jaime turned back to the coil of line. A great deal of it had been payed out and no more than ten fathoms remained on the beach. The play of the water had scattered the coil somewhat, but as they watched they could not see that there was any definite tension upon it.

"Must be out there," said Chenoweth, quietly. "Been gone fifteen or twenty minutes. That's enough for him."

He picked up the end of the line and as he stood holding it, peering out at the buoy, a sudden resentment of the enveloping darkness overcame him.

"Why in hell can't there be a moon or something? How do we know where Bill is?"

Don Jaime flashed a curious glance at him.

"It is better for us that it is dark," he observed casually. "Those aboard the submarine would possibly interfere if they saw. I have been giving thanks that the lighthouse which the president has promised for this point is not built. Elements of fortune are with us thus far."

"That's true, of course," said Chenoweth in a different tone. Then after a moment: "It's low tide now. There should not be more than four fathoms of water around the buoy, should there?"

Don Jaime hesitated.

"I think the chart gives four fathoms. I am not so familiar with this harbor as would be well."

"I'll make it in anything less than thirty feet."

TEN minutes after this, Sergeant Gomez returned and the men began carrying short, dry timbers from the car down to the beach. While Chenoweth and Don Jaime were overseeing this work, a voice close behind them said:

"Line's fast."

Bill Johnson, apparently undisturbed by his lack of clothes, was standing there, dripping, having come out of the water a little way inside the river mouth and walked back. His voice was strong and he did not seem to be any the worse for his swim. No time was lost in compliments.

"How is it, Bill?" demanded Chenoweth briefly. "Submarine very close?"

"Not enough to bother you. Where's my pants?"

While Bill dressed, the soldiers made the heavy hook at the end of the wire rope fast between two of the railway ties and dragged the little raft down to the water's edge. Chenoweth in turn slipped out of his clothes and followed them.

"You get the idea," he said. "I'm going to pull this raft out to the buoy by this line. You slack the wire as I need it and every little while tie one of these logs on to float it. Keep the end of that light line fast so I can pull myself back."

He hesitated a moment, then walked knee deep into the water.

"Give me a hand to get this thing through the surf."

Five or six men were with him, heaving the raft along. A wave lifted it, half flung it back while they struggled for footholds, then another was past in a quick upward swoop before it broke and everything was left behind but warm, black water. Chenoweth pulled stubbornly and almost blindly on the thin line for several minutes. The two dry timbers were enough to float him as well as the hook, but lay barely awash.

He gained steadily. The strain on his arms increased as more and more wire was payed out, but by holding on with his legs, he was able to use his full strength. For a long time the bright flashing of the buoy seemed as far away as ever. Then all at once he could see the reflection of the light on its hollow base. There was a change, too, in its monotonous moaning, a change of timbre rather than of volume, a faint creaking and a surge of water thinning and sharpening its solemn voice.

Chenoweth caught a turn around the end of one log beneath him and rested a minute or two. His arms definitely ached and he was short of breath. When he looked up again, the white light he had seen from the beach was passing slowly just beyond the buoy, and about it he could distinguish the shadow of the submarine's conning tower. It was closer than he liked, so he floated without moving while it turned and drew away to the southward.

The sea, hardly disturbed by the breeze, lifted him on soft, smooth swells. A little distance inshore of the raft he could make out an intermittent but persistent ripple of phosphorous which he thought would mark the first of the line of buoying logs. Nearer at hand, he discovered two tiny swirls of light, moving across between him and the buoy. There was a faint, intermittent splashing from that direction, so he decided that they must be the fins of two fish, cruising side by side. Even when they turned, he was amused to see how exactly they maintained the distance between them.

They were too small to belong to sharks, but the possibility of barracudas was disquieting. The fins disappeared some three or four fathoms away and Chenoweth breathed more easily, despite a persistently creepy feeling in his submerged legs. The submarine was a safe distance away and he was hauling the raft ahead again when a grotesque, diamond shaped body trailing a long, thin tail, the whole wierdly outlined in phosphorous, banked sharply across his path. The thing was six feet across the back, the long way of the diamond, with tail almost as long. Chenoweth felt a ball of ice in his stomach spread sickeningly and freeze his entire body. It was a giant sting ray. Instantaneously he remembered a man in a tropical hospital who had been foul of a small one. When the doctor poked his leg with one finger, the hole remained minute after minute.

This time the ray vanished as suddenly as it had appeared, and Chenoweth hauled the raft toward the buoy again with as little noise as possible, his eyes fixed on the water before him and lips drawn back thinly over his teeth. He was almost alongside before the two flippers broke the surface again with their mild skittering. The ghostly body slipped past so close that the man's flesh crawled. It appeared to be circling him in leisurely fashion, curious rather than angry. The flash of hope came to him that if he could avoid running into the thing, it might not attack.

One more pull on the heaving line brought him within reach of the buoy and in swift, uncontrollable horror of the soft water he caught a steel brace of the framework and dragged himself onto the hollow base. He stood there trembling, clinging to the framework, chilled suddenly by the gentle breeze. The white light had flashed twice above his head, dazzlingly, before he remembered the nearness of the submarine and dropped again flat on the almost level base of the buoy.

There was no sign of the ray now and the raft floated tranquilly alongside, so he began to prepare for a dive. Working quickly, careful all the while to keep his body low, he hauled in several fathoms of slack wire and cut loose the hook from the raft. The dead weight of the hook and wire in his downstretched hand was greater than he had expected, and he lost any doubts he had had about getting to the bottom with it. The only accident he feared was losing hold under water of the buoy's anchor chain; so to prevent this he carried the hook laboriously around the buoy and back to the standing part of the wire.

He drew an easy, natural breath and crawled to the edge of the buoy. Then, with one leg almost overboard, he writhed convulsively backward. The broad back of the sting ray was floating up through the water scarcely a yard away. It was almost on the surface, shadowy and slow. Chenoweth could see the oddly doglike head on its cold, sluggish body. In the palely luminous water the tail showed clearly, trailing behind. The thing's menace was the menace of a mad dog, blind, unreasoning, terrible. The very sight of the water in which it floated was loathsome.

It lay motionless before the buoy, the phosphorescence quieting about it, leaving a thick deadly shadow. Minutes passed and the shadow had not moved. Then, without a sound, it began to go down. It faded slowly, straight for the bottom, leaving the surface free and tranquil. Chenoweth hooked the end of the cable through a ring bolt on the inshore side of the buoy and lay breathing heavily.

To go down deliberately on top of that thing was too much to ask. There was no use in making the hook fast near the surface; the first real strain would simply pull the buoy under.

HE TURNED and looked seaward again, but even the one faint light had disappeared and he could form no idea of the submarine's position. There was hardly any time in which to decide what to do. The necessity for haste was exasperating, goading, unbearable.

Then, without any warning, the entire buoy was bathed in light and a loud, rough voice barked, close at hand:

"On de buoy dere. Move before I say so and you get a bullet in de head."

Chenoweth lay rigid, his face the other way, startled beyond any thought but one. To reach the cable he would have to squirm clear across the buoy, under fire from a distance of perhaps twenty yards, in the full rays of a searchlight. . . . Suicide. There his mind stopped working.

The voice was speaking again, lower, gratingly.

"Stand up slow. Make one quick move and you get it."

Chenoweth rose carefully.

"Turn around."

He faced the blinding glare of the light with closed eyes. The light moved down to his waist and he looked out into the darkness. The low deck of the submarine lay almost alongside the buoy, guns and conning tower taking shape gradually. Fully a dozen sailors were grouped about the two guns, waiting. Chenoweth counted four rifles leveled at his breast. A short, heavy man on the tiny bridge spoke in the voice Chenoweth had heard before.

"Come aboard ven ve come alongside. If you yump before, ve shoot you in de vater."

The submarine crept closer, slowly, noiselessly, until there was hardly a fathom of water between the sloping side and the buoy.

"Now," ordered the captain briefly. "Yump!"

Chenoweth thought momentarily of pretending to fall, but even if no one fired he was on the wrong side of the buoy. There was no way out. His leap brought him easily to the submarine's deck, where two seamen caught his arms. The searchlight went out and the captain climbed down ponderously from the bridge.

He came close to Chenoweth, who stood between the two seamen on the shadowy forward deck, and shifted a pocket flashlight from his face, over his gleaming body and back to his face again. In the other hand was the squat bulk of a service automatic.

"Now den," he growled. "Vat vere you doing on dat buoy? Talk fast."

Instead Chenoweth thought fast.

"Really, Captain," he replied in a polite, puzzled voice, "I can't see what all the disturbance is about. I am a member of a scientific expedition down here to investigate the activities of the lower forms of animal life in the tropics. We left New York—that's where Columbia University is, you know—quite recently. The expedition's temporary headquarters are not far up the coast. I found the water warm and attractive for swimming, this evening, so I simply used the buoy for an objective, don't you know."

The captain smiled sardonically, but not without relief.

"Vell, Mister Scientist, ve haf use for dat buoy tonight. Ve saw you ven you stood up a vile ago and it looked suspicious."

He was silent a moment, rubbing his heavy chin thoughtfully.

"You vant to go ashore again, I suppose."

Chenoweth nodded pleasantly.

"Yes, the rest of the crowd will want me to take a hand in a game they're going to play."

Chenoweth felt the grip of the two seamen relax a little on his arms, but the captain was frowning again.

"I think I keep you here until my business is done. It iss no baby game I play. In de morning ve let you go."

Chenoweth began a startled protest.

"I say, Captain, I have to be there for that game. I——"

The sudden low fury of the captain's interruption amazed him.

"Silence! I haff no more time for you."

A brief rumble of German followed to the two seamen who held Chenoweth and immediately he was hauled forward toward a hatchway in the narrow, gray deck. The flash of the buoy was still within two fathoms of the rail. In a moment the submarine would be under way again with himself beyond hope below in its cavernous depths.

His captors' hands were about his biceps, leaving elbows and forearms free. The other men on the forward deck, silent figures in shapeless dungarees, were gathered at the breech of the three inch gun, ten feet away.

The same quick heave of Chenoweth's forearms that brought his captors' heads crashing together swung their bodies between him and the captain's automatic. Their hands grappled at him dazedly, but Chenoweth was still wet and slippery. Fingernails seared his back like fire and his free right arm lashed in reply. One of the seaman dropped, and holding the other as a shield, he began backing toward the rail. He could hear the captain shouting thickly and men came lurching at him across the wet, steel plates. There was no weariness left. His arms lifted powerfully and his shield went tumbling and rolling against the legs of the gun crew. He turned, slipped, found the rail; then the captain's gun barked sharply, like his voice interrupting, and Chenoweth staggered as a hot bar of iron slashed his shoulder.

In the instant it took him to realize that he was not disabled, arms locked about his knees and he went down in a tangle of men, turning over and over desperately. Hands clutched, slipped and tore away; elbows and knees pounded him in blind mercilessness; and he kept on rolling, twisting, kicking, anything to keep the terrible combined weight of all those men from settling on him. Loose dungarees and sea boots were heavy, but slower than his hard nakedness. Once more he lurched clear, completely bruised and bleeding, and found the light of the buoy. A bare knee clicked under the chin of a man squatting between him and the rail; two shots from the captain's automatic were misses, the last with his body stretched in diving; then the overpowering darkness of water was about him, pressing warmly against arms and legs.

WHEN he came up, the buoy was between him and the submarine. The searchlight was groping coldly and he could hear heavy, angry voices. He found the end of the wire cable, loosed it from the buoy and lay for a minute low in the water, holding to the ring bolt and breathing deeply. The searchlight began to draw slowly ahead, and beneath the surface he could hear a slow throbbing of propellers.

The light turned, shifted over the water, then blazed suddenly from a new angle in his eyes. A rifle spat and there was the thin whine of a ricocheting bullet as Chenoweth let go the ring bolt, but there had been no time for a real aim.

The bight of wire sank rapidly, carrying his relaxed body with it. The darkness was thicker than it had been, but at first he was as warm as ever. After a few seconds he reached a stratum of cold water that was hard and unexpectedly terrifying. He kept his mind on placing the hook, accepting fear in passing. The realization that there was only one chance strengthened him. The pressure of the water was like a tightening net and the need for air, sharp pain. Abruptly, the long soft falling was over and the back of his left hand met jagged stones. The effort of moving was tremendous and agonizing, a convulsive grappling with force itself.

Then, somehow, the hook was in place and he was shooting up through the black water. His head broke the surface in darkness, the dusty circle of the searchlight moving some distance away. He paddled quietly a moment and looked about. Further inshore, a slow swell poured phosphorous over the first buoying log on the cable, its top still a few inches above the surface. His raft was still in sight but had drifted fairly under the submarine's rail. The light hesitated, turned and came swiftly toward him. Chenoweth's head went down smoothly and he swam under water toward the single log. A long breast stroke carried him, until one hand scraped the thin, hard cable. He came up easily on the inshore side of the log and held on lightly with just his nose above water.

The searchlight still wandered up and down, but more perfunctorily. It passed over Chenoweth's sheltering log at long range, wavered, returned and steadied upon it. There was a moment's stillness, then a swift, brief crackle of rifle fire. Chenoweth heard two bullets strike the wood within a foot of his head and a third zip into the water beside his ear.

"Nice shooting," he muttered to himself and prepared unhappily to submerge again. There was no more firing, however, and a few seconds later the searchlight winked out altogether.

Chenoweth found his knife, cut loose the cable, which instantly whipped out of sight into the depths, and then he clung, relaxed, to the drifting log.

The thought of the sting ray, when it came presently to his mind for the first time since the submarine captain's hail, no longer disturbed him. He yielded to the fatalism of weariness and many bruises. If it was going to get him, it was going to get him. He could think and fight no more.

Later, when he had begun to paddle doggedly toward shore, his hand found a section of the heaving line still afloat above the cable. He pulled himself along by it carefully, pausing at each buoying log to cut the cable free. The submarine had gone back to its slow patrolling of the harbor mouth and there was nothing to contend with except acute, numbing weariness. When he looked back, the sea buoy seemed a long way off.

Minutes later he began to feel new strength and direction in the carrying swells and realized dully what had happened. The raft was in the grip of the surf and his work was finished. A long, gentle roller lifted the short log and carried it forward, slowly at first, then with rising speed.

Chenoweth was holding on grimly, muscles taut and aching, when the abrupt whiteness of surf boiled up about him, the log swung sideways and tumbled over, and he was scrambling through shallow water on hands and feet. Another moment and he lay stretched at full length on the sand, breathing the cool vacancy of air hoarsely. Wave after wave of nausea ran through his body, shaking him from head to foot.

Invisible men came crowding around, startled and solicitous, their feet grinding the sand. Only Bill Johnson's steady voice, "You all right, Duke?" conquered the darkness and brought him to himself. He sat up, staggered to his feet, and began brushing the sand from his wet body.

"Hook's fast, Bill. You can move the buoy any time."

"We thought you were gone, kid. That searchlight and rifle firin' sounded like the finish to us. What happened?"

One of the soldiers had brought Chenoweth his clothes, so his voice came soft and muffled from the depths of his undershirt.

"I been on board the submarine. Whole crew of Dutchmen. Must be left over from the Big War like Don Manuel's flyers. Had a fight—been foul of a sting ray. Tell you all about it later. We got to keep busy now."

Bill whistled softly. Then, when Chenoweth was ready, the whole party went back to the top of the first hill, where the tractor stood waiting like a patient, exaggerated donkey. By running it down into the valley beyond, they planned both to gain the advantage of a downhill pull and to make the sound of its engine less significant to the crew of the submarine. A snatch block, made fast to a stout tree on the brow of the hill, gave a good lead to the wire, and at Don Jaime's command a soldier started the tractor down the inner slope.

It ran easily without much noise until all slack was taken in and the wire led up from the sea as taut as a violin string. Then the driver stopped the engine. Don Jaime marked carefully the place where the tractor stood.

"One hundred and twenty yards straight ahead," he directed.

A soldier, carrying binoculars, came down from the hilltop to report the submarine headed away from the buoy, and the tractor promptly threw its weight against the wire. The wide caterpillar treads bore irresistibly against the rough ground and the wire yielded slowly.

CHENOWETH scrambled back to the top of the hill to watch. The noise of the tractor's progress was not so loud as he had feared and the single light which had appeared again on the conning tower of the submarine moved steadily on. The sea buoy was flashing as brightly as ever, not noticeably disturbed by the shifting of its anchor. It was still well offshore, when the tractor came to a full stop.

A minute later Don Jaime was at Chenoweth's side.

"A hundred and twenty yards clear, Captain. There is no more to do."

"Good. I suppose we might as well stay here. It's the only place we can see everything from."

Don Jaime studied the luminous dial of his wrist watch.

"We have not long to wait."

"Submarine's getting into position," observed Bill casually.

Everyone looked out to sea. The dim white light had swung back to the north and was motionless now, well beyond the buoy.

"It would be better," said Don Jaime, "to lie down."

The whole detail sprawled in an irregular line along the ridge on the rocky earth, half sheltered by rough grass and weeds. Behind them, Villanueva was only a level depression in the darkness, silent and deserted. The sea and the long harbor were dull black.

Chenoweth was staring expectantly at the light on the submarine's conning tower when the first shot was fired, a sudden jet of flame that left him blinking, with circles of dimming green and violet before his eyes. The scream of the shell and its sharp bursting above the marsh followed closely. Another gun flamed from the darkness and the men on Point Coria stopped trying to talk.

The bombardment went on rapidly; the report of guns, scream of shells and final bursting joining in a vicious but strangely orderly chorus. The full length and breadth of the marsh across the river from Villanueva was combed with shrapnel and high explosive. A few shells burst in the harbor, raising geysers of ghostly spray, but not one reached the city.

Beyond a deep satisfaction at the success of his plan, Chenoweth was not aroused. He had seen artillery at it before and this exhibition from two light guns was not very impressive. He admitted, however, that the gunners were doing a nice, accurate job of the marsh.

Hours passed, the firing sometimes rapid, sometimes dying away for minutes together; and the weariness of the men on Point Coria began to be overpowering. At three o'clock in the morning the bombardment was still going on, but in desultory fashion, shells falling at long intervals of time and space.

Don Jaime was lying at the foot of the only tree on the ridge, his chin resting wearily on his arms. Near him, Chenoweth and Johnson and most of the soldiers were stretched out among the stones, frankly asleep.

Another shell burst in the river with a damp, disconsolate *whup!* After that came extending silence. Don Jaime's head drooped suddenly to one side and his cap slipped down over one eye without being readjusted. The general, perhaps due to his cramped position, snored gently, but the breathing of the others was deep and regular.

After a long time the damp coolness of the air took on a keener edge and Chenoweth shivered himself awake. The first thing he realized was that he was stiff and aching all over, the next that the bombardment had stopped, and the last that there was a distinct grayness in the eastern sky, stray radiations of which brought out the shape of the tree under which he lay and made visible the scattered forms of his sleeping companions. He rolled over and unceremoniously poked Bill Johnson in the ribs.

The engineer groaned and pulled himself to a sitting position.

"Wassa matter?"

Chenoweth grinned.

"I woke up and got lonesome. They're not shooting any more and it's almost morning."

Bill cocked an eyebrow at the somewhat disarranged general.

"Don Jaime's tearin' it off, too. That's a hell of a bombardment that can't even keep you awake."

"Would have taken something to keep me awake," Chenoweth said. "I was tired."

"Uh-huh. You look awful. Yer shoulder's been doin' some bleedin', but it looks like it ain't fatal. Wonder what would be a good way to wake His Excellency up?"

Don Jaime opened one eye and returned Bill's look. Then the soldier stretched himself with an expression of tentative agony on his face and sat up.

The sea was gray now under silver, and a long distance offshore the back of the submarine was beginning to show against the water. Men were still about the two gun platforms on her deck but the guns themselves were silent.

To the westward the low, flat roofs, unsubstantial balconies and narrow piers of Villanueva were quiet and undamaged, half hidden by the mist of morning. The marsh on the other side of the river, coming slowly out of the shadows, was not green and luxuriant any longer, but a wide stretch of dark mud, torn and pitted to the water's edge.

The three officers on the ridge of Point Coria watched silently while the east brightened and turned red. The sea buoy was tall and lonely looking above the sweep of silver water. On the other side of the hill the tractor waited patiently, nose pointing downward, like a relic of past adventure. In the clear morning, the desperation of the night before seemed fantastic and a little ridiculous.

JUST before sunrise, Bill Johnson raised an arm and pointed southward without speaking. A faint blur of smoke had risen on the sea horizon.

"That," said Don Jaime, after a minute in which the smoke grew darker, "will be the *Santissima Trinidad.*"

Out beyond the buoy the submarine crew, also, had seen the smoke, and already the smooth, gray hull was beginning to submerge. As the sea washed about the sides of her conning tower, the bow of the scout cruiser took form suddenly and there was a red flash in the still distant cloud of smoke. The sound that followed was heavy and metallic, and a plume of white spray jumped out of the sea within a hundred yards of the submarine.

The gray water was swirling over her narrow bridge when the next shell struck, then she was gone into the depths while the sea above her smoked with farewell shots.

The men on Point Coria scrambled to their feet.

"Got away," said Bill Johnson regretfully.

Chenoweth nodded.

"Sure did, but he's not going to bother Villanueva any more while the *Trinidad's* here, and there'll be some fortifications before she leaves."

The long gray cruiser was much closer now, tearing in toward the sea buoy at her full twenty knots, a smooth, foam topped curl of water parting at her knife-like stem and the shining blue and white of San Lorenzo snapping from her ensign staff.

In the midst of eager admiration, Chenoweth remembered his seamanship.

"Better let him know about that buoy being moved, Don Jaime. You got a signalman here?"

From the highest rock on the point, with handkerchiefs tied to rough sticks for flags, the general himself semaphored the warning, and a little later the cruiser, making the channel a hundred and fifty yards short of the buoy, came safely into the harbor.

The sun was clear of the water now and Chenoweth and Bill Johnson had both light and leisure to study each other for the first time in some hours.

The captain's nose wrinkled, a light of merriment danced in his eyes.

"You're a mess, Bill. Why don't you wash your face and wring out your pants?"

Bill looked him over searchingly.

"Buddy, listen. . . ."

Don Jaime stepped forward, then guided them, with a hand on each man's shoulder, to the western side of the ridge and pointed silently. The river beach, the trails leading down from the hills, and the streets of Villanueva were all amove with people returning without fear to their homes.

A minute later Don Jaime was at Chenoweth's side.

"A hundred and twenty yards clear, Captain. There is no more to do."

"Good. I suppose we might as well stay here. It's the only place we can see everything from."

Don Jaime studied the luminous dial of his wrist watch.

"We have not long to wait."

"Submarine's getting into position," observed Bill casually.

Everyone looked out to sea. The dim white light had swung back to the north and was motionless now, well beyond the buoy.

"It would be better," said Don Jaime, "to lie down."

The whole detail sprawled in an irregular line along the ridge on the rocky earth, half sheltered by rough grass and weeds. Behind them, Villanueva was only a level depression in the darkness, silent and deserted. The sea and the long harbor were dull black.

Chenoweth was staring expectantly at the light on the submarine's conning tower when the first shot was fired, a sudden jet of flame that left him blinking, with circles of dimming green and violet before his eyes. The scream of the shell and its sharp bursting above the marsh followed closely. Another gun flamed from the darkness and the men on Point Coria stopped trying to talk.

The bombardment went on rapidly; the report of guns, scream of shells and final bursting joining in a vicious but strangely orderly chorus. The full length and breadth of the marsh across the river from Villanueva was combed with shrapnel and high explosive. A few shells burst in the harbor, raising geysers of ghostly spray, but not one reached the city.

Beyond a deep satisfaction at the success of his plan, Chenoweth was not aroused. He had seen artillery at it before and this exhibition from two light guns was not very impressive. He admitted, however, that the gunners were doing a nice, accurate job of the marsh.

Hours passed, the firing sometimes rapid, sometimes dying away for minutes together; and the weariness of the men on Point Coria began to be overpowering. At three o'clock in the morning the bombardment was still going on, but in desultory fashion, shells falling at long intervals of time and space.

Don Jaime was lying at the foot of the only tree on the ridge, his chin resting wearily on his arms. Near him, Chenoweth and Johnson and most of the soldiers were stretched out among the stones, frankly asleep.

Another shell burst in the river with a damp, disconsolate *whup!* After that came extending silence. Don Jaime's head drooped suddenly to one side and his cap slipped down over one eye without being readjusted. The general, perhaps due to his cramped position, snored gently, but the breathing of the others was deep and regular.

After a long time the damp coolness of the air took on a keener edge and Chenoweth shivered himself awake. The first thing he realized was that he was stiff and aching all over, the next that the bombardment had stopped, and the last that there was a distinct grayness in the eastern sky, stray radiations of which brought out the shape of the tree under which he lay and made visible the scattered forms of his sleeping companions. He rolled over and unceremoniously poked Bill Johnson in the ribs.

The engineer groaned and pulled himself to a sitting position.

"Wassa matter?"

Chenoweth grinned.

"I woke up and got lonesome. They're not shooting any more and it's almost morning."

Bill cocked an eyebrow at the somewhat disarranged general.

"Don Jaime's tearin' it off, too. That's a hell of a bombardment that can't even keep you awake."

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# Everybody's Meeting PLACE

## *Where writers, readers and the editor gather for informal discussion*

MY PREDECESSOR in the editorial chair once asked, here in the *Meeting Place,* whether or not you folks wanted a preponderance of Western stories. It was a rash request. He was promptly swamped with letters, and the opinions they registered were so emphatic and diverse and contradictory that it was well nigh impossible to form a definite conclusion from them.

This reader, modestly requesting the omission of his name, writes a letter which is an echo of that old controversy.

> I have been getting EVERYBODY'S this year through the postmaster here and am just sending in a renewal subscription through him. You are certainly making it a real good magazine. Anyway it appeals to me, for like ADVENTURE, its stories so often bring to me reminiscences of the *furderstrand* and seven seas that I spent a lifetime roaming in. I hope you will copy ADVENTURE and become a bi-monthly.
>
> But a few months back you came out with a promise to cut out those Western stories. Lord, why don't you? I know lots of magazine readers, and we are all so sick of cowboy six-gun trash!
>
> I sometimes enjoy Tuttle's yarns, but solely because he is so humorous and makes them good detective puzzles.
>
> Surely there are Wild West magazines for the folks who do like them. Why spoil your publication with them?
>
> Wishing you the best of luck!

My only answer to this reader's objection is to point out the sort of Western story which has been appearing of late in the magazine. The conventional six-gun cowboy hero is fairly scarce in our pages. Certainly we could not ignore the West, where so much of our country's history developed and where the mighty epic of a people in the making was enacted. What we can do is to try to find the *real* West, the real heroes, and the real stories, of which that land affords a limitless store.

If you think that we in the office here miss our aim at any time (which since we are human, lies not in the realm of the impossible), why, write and tell us so. The magazine is yours, as much as you care to make it.

### DESERT SAVVY

HERE is such a letter as I speak of above. I am sorry that there is not room to print it in full. It is a letter of criticism; but even more, it is a defense by the writer of a maligned land which to him is forever lovely.

> I am not a new reader of EVERYBODY'S; fact is we've been acquainted for nearly twenty years—during which time we've had a few words now and then, but have always made up again—and, generally speaking, it has been a mighty good companion.
>
> The last time the magazine and I fell out was in March; one story in that issue having knocked me for a row of covered wagons with an airplane scout! By April, though, we again spoke to each other, and the May number, by coming along with a very pleasing desert atmosphere—both fiction and comment—as it did, effected a complete reconciliation. As to this letter, it is simply the result of my being unable to resist the temptation to horn in where there is any discussion about deserts going on.
>
> This desert of mine (I call it mine, though it be claimed by many whom it has inspired) is no less than that vast area termed the Great Basin, in the middle of which I found myself at the ripe old age of four. As to stories about it, those which have appeared in EVERYBODY'S have, with few exceptions, been mighty good and I want you to know I appreciate them.
>
> Occasionally, however, a notable exception to the usual high quality appears. It may, and I suppose it does, go over with the uninitiated reader whose conception of our Western deserts borders on the picture show variety; but to the desert wise one its weaknesses are quickly and clearly apparent. Its faults are various and are likely so to distort the reader's imagination that he gives up in bewilderment, places his bookmark at the beginning of the next story, fills his pipe and goes out in the yard to cool off and

establish something of a mental equilibrium—like our friend Mr. Wells, whose good-natured comment appeared in the June issue.

I do not mean to insinuate that such an experience as befell our hero, in the yarn in question, could not possibly have happened, nor do I intentionally infer that its like will never happen again; for the desert has its terrors for en who, unheeding of better advice, rush gnorantly into it in the heat of summer, only to leave their bleaching bones as mute evidence f their folly, or to come back spreading ernicious tales of a horrible land.

Familiar with the desert from childhood, it is o me a land I know and a land I love—beautiful, idescent and awesome land of mystery, endowed with a grandeur comparable to no other egion in the world. For me it holds no dread deal—only an inexorable fascination.

*Harold A. Bates,*
Riverside, California.

### THE SPIRIT OF THE OLD T. T. T.

I HOPE that none of you missed EDGAR YOUNG's remarkable story, *Emulation*, in the August issue. If so, let the ollowing extract from a letter that just ame to my desk persuade you to dig up our copy and remedy the oversight. You ill not regret it.

> Edgar Young's *Emulation*, in this issue, is a asterpiece. You should never have defended ourself for running it. Hell's fire, man! Don't ou know there have been a good ten thousand f us who have stood on that spot, bared our eads, and many of us have mumbled a word f invocation to our own particular gods for the wo youngsters who typified our breed as they ied there? I know it, anyway. Edgar Young nows it, because his feet have stood there, too.
>
> "The spirit of the old T. T. T." The spirit at gave everything its owner possessed, even life itself, for a brother, or a principle. The pirit that had rather shrivel in fire, with eyes plifted and a taunt that could be choked only y the strangling smoke, than to show his ecutioner that he was afraid. Those boys were oth afraid. They were scared almost to death efore the tinder was even lighted. One of em, the stronger one, faltered for a moment. is weaker (?) brother sacrificed his own last oment of self-pity to stretch out a hand from e portal of eternity and help his brother across.
>
> That is the spirit, brother, that has lived down ere among our brotherhood for fifty years. e tramp gave his last dime to the other who as moving on. Strangers to each other met, d one was in trouble, physical, mental, or ancial. The other stepped out and sometimes ced an angry gleaming knife or gun, and oulder to shoulder they saw it through.
>
> We worked, together. We fought, together. hen one of us had the price, we ate, together. d when the great showdown came, and we d to face the end of the trail, death beckoned us, together.
>
> "A brave breed of men," you say. Not by a damned sight, mister! But we were all of us afraid to ever show that we were afraid. More afraid of the opinion of our fellow tramps than we were of death. We died, scared stiff, but you did not see our knees wobble, and the men we faced never saw the tight clenched lips that bled beneath our grinding teeth.
>
> You don't need to introduce one of the breed to me. I know them all. I recognize them walking down the street. I know them when I hear them talking, sometimes in their offices and sometimes in their homes. And occasionally one even looks at me from out the print of a magazine. Long may they live, and prosper, and you too!
>
> *A. "T. T. T.,"*
> (Captain W. R. Bethel)

### A TIP TO ROVERS

I RECOMMEND the advice of BURKE BOYCE, author of *The Outcast*, to those who would travel by ship in a manner best calculated to make them acquainted with the sea and its eternal glamour. He says, introducing himself:

> I was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1901. But that fact, beyond giving me first hand observation of early airplane flights, a World's Fair, and several minor Mississippi floods, has not particularly influenced my career. I have never written a "St. Louis Blues", nor driven an airplane across any kind of an ocean.
>
> For no definite reason I chose to go to Harvard after my family moved to New York. And when I had graduated, I stayed there as an assistant instructor in English composition and literature. At the same time I took my Master's degree.
>
> During my college course I had become interested in fencing, and in 1924, by some good luck, I was placed third in the National Championships, and was sent across with the American Olympic Team. That summer I also indulged in a cycle tour of France and England.
>
> On my return, G. P. Putnam, who is a splendid chap in spite of the amount of time he spends in the neighborhood of Greenland, sent me around the world as editor of the ship's newspaper on board the S. S. *Belgenland*. And though I am a writer, I still feel that my greatest single achievement so far has been the convoying of eighty pieces of hand luggage from Calcutta to Darjeeling, with a record of six changes of trains, no single coolie who spoke English, and not one piece of luggage lost.
>
> It was while I was on this trip that a Texas magazine accepted my first poem—and set me to writing in dead earnest.
>
> I have since had stories and poems accepted in England, France, India, and America. But I find it stimulating, both financially and mentally, to continue my position with the National Broadcasting Company, where I am assisting in the production and development of Bigger and Better Radio.

My sea experience, from which I have drawn some of my stories, began at the age of seventeen, when I served as a seaman before the mast in our Merchant Marine during several months of the late lamented war. I had all the thrills except that of being torpedoed—but I did see a ship struck not five hundred yards from my own vessel, and watched the men scramble from her while she sank in seventeen minutes. Two years later I made a trip to Panama, sailing as captain's yeoman, and watching the workings of a vessel from the bridge and officers' quarters. And several times I have made trips abroad as the sole passenger on a small freighter.

I sincerely advise this method of sea voyaging; you have the run of the ship, and everyone comes to your cabin to spin yarns. And you listen with a serious face, and let them think they are pulling your leg; and then you write the yarns up, and get checks for them.

Of course, you have to enjoy writing—but as far as I can remember, that is the only form of labor which has ever strongly appealed to me.

*Burke Boyce.*

### COYOTES WITH RABIES

ONE yarn in this issue may sound fantastic, but I happen to know that it has some foundation in fact. Coyotes actually were infected with rabies in one Western State, and the experiment was disastrous. The author of *Scienterrific*, RAYMOND S. SPEARS, says:

> Many thanks for Mr. Hull's address and the incident of the filler about the alleged Montana rabies distribution. I just couldn't imagine such a thing, myself, at first. But I see that German scientists have been inoculating, for experimental purposes, the children of the poor—it was in the papers three or four days ago. Imagine, giving little children disease on purpose!
>
> *Spears.*

I wonder if any of you were on the spot when those rabies inoculations were made. It would be extremely interesting to have from a witness an account of the subsequent effects. And incidentally it may be explained that Mr. Spears' mention of Montana, above, refers to an old rumor that the experiment originated in that section—a rumor which has been officially denied by the State.

### SOME BOUQUETS AND A SMALL BRICKBAT

ANOTHER pleasant message. And once again the question of serials. This reader has missed some of the best fiction we've published.

> I find that I'm falling into a bad habit here of late—writing letters to magazine editors. True, I have written them before, but not often. This makes two this week.
>
> All the stories in the June issue were excell but I believe that Liggett's *The Grudge Fi* and Downey's *The Music of the Stars* stood h and shoulders above the rest. Why I sho choose two yarns of such different note as two best I cannot say, unless it is on acco of the finished workmanship—of a tale th almost told itself. I'd certainly like to r more by those two gentlemen.
>
> Now I'd like to say just a word or two ab the rest of the magazine before closing. W oh why, can't we have some real short myst stories, or novelettes—something like the Cleek stories? I admit your mystery serials good—but I've never yet read an EVERYBO serial. The reason? Well, you see I pass magazine on. By the time a serial is finis I've got the last instalment. Read it as i printed? I used to try that with a magaz that printed four or five serials each week. delightful hodgepodge of characters and stra happenings was the result. So I said "Ne again!" When I read my serials now I w the entire story before I start chapter o (I'm trying to convince myself I'll be abl keep the July number until I can get the Aug number so that I can read Shafer's story. H a favorite of mine.)
>
> I appreciate LaCossitt's stories and am plea to see (in the June *Author & Journalist*) t he is to be editor of ROMANCE. Noticed y remarks in regard to Leinster's story in coming issue. He's another favorite of mi I'd like to see lots of his stuff, too.
>
> Well, anyway the best of luck to you EVERYBODY'S!
>
> *L. R. Ingles,*
> St. Joseph, Missouri

### TIMBER FALLERS AND BARK PEELERS

A SALTY member of the brotherh of the big woods stands up for own. Here are some of his co ments. He speaks of the brand of sto most popular today.

> There are several varieties. Cowboy advent seem to be the prevailing type with all kind gun play. For myself I can't say I'm strong on them. Lumbering, bark pee logging are my preferences.
>
> From the time I was big enough to stradd horse until I was twenty years old, I pun cattle. I never could learn to ride good, got some pretty nasty spills and was so what wrecked.
>
> I quit riding after getting over a smash and went into the woods. Like a duck ta to water I took to big timber falling. falling timber is the hardest kind of work.
>
> About the time I entered the lumbering g the donkey engine was taking the place of o Very few ox teams were still in use in the wo Locomotives had displaced the method of raf the logs to the mill. The only rafts made t

d now are put together on the beach and
wed to cities.

There is another timber industry I have seen
tle written about. That is bark peeling. This
hard, dangerous work. A man to stand up
it all day and make his output has to be a
l man.

The first bark camp I worked in I got fired
r whipping the walking boss. The boss's
ughter later run off with a no account breed.
dropped into a job a mile below in a lumber
np, as saw filer. I had the only saddle horse
the woods and the tan bark boss wanted to
rrow him to go after his daughter. The horse
ed the old man and nearly broke his back.
e begged for me to go after his girl. After
ying it considerable consideration and feeling
rry for the old man, I did. I overtook the
low and the girl ten miles below camp, on a
il hardly ever used by any of the camp crews.
a steep bank across a creek the fellow
gged the girl. I could not get across the
ek with the horse. I put spurs to the plug
d run down to the creek. I jerked my rope
se and tossed it onto Mr. Half-Breed and
g him over the rocks and through the water.
was sure some scared Indian.

After I'd got him I had not the faintest idea
at I'd do with him. All I thought of was
tting the girl back. She was only sixteen.
t the right age to be foolish. I slipped the
e off the breed. He was groaning like he
s going to pass in his checks. No sooner
s the rope off and he was gone, right now.
ook the girl on the saddle with me and the
rse objected to carrying double and piled the
o of us. For camp, fast as he could go, the
rse went on high. Me and the girl had to
of it back to camp.

The ragging the boys handed out to me—
n, oh man!

*M. O. Walker,*
Woodland, Yolo County, California.

### HARDBOILED AND MEDIUM

NE Sunday morning last summer
a certain New York preacher
startled his congregation by inform-
them that he had driven a taxicab
ough the streets of the city every night
several weeks. He had been taken
h the idea of seeing life, of coming in
tact with that elusive quantity, the
rld, which so sedulously avoids brush-
elbows with those of his calling. He
gone in search of life, and he had
nd it, and he was ready to report.

t was mighty interesting, that report.
was the fruit of a great and worthy
iosity. In it were the conclusions of an alert mind. But for all that, and with due respect to the cloth, it was the half beglamored, half scandalized observation of one who was inevitably an outsider. It was the story of a preacher in a taxi seat, not Life from a taxi seat.

Of any representative line of hackmen, waiting at a stand—one may be a furrier on a seasonal lay-off; a second, a salt water sailor, ashore at the behest of his wife; a third, an ex-crook with a reformatory and penitentiary record; a fourth, a ham vaudevillian vainly waiting for an engagement; another, a pro golfer with no winter job; another, an old coachman who looks sourly on a motor drawn world; and still another, a kid but newly licensed and thrilled to be called "Cowboy!" in amiable derision by the veterans.

Most of them are married. Most of them have children. They have responsibilities and must work hard—and only a hackman knows how hard!—to keep pace with them. Rightly approached they prove to be good fellows.

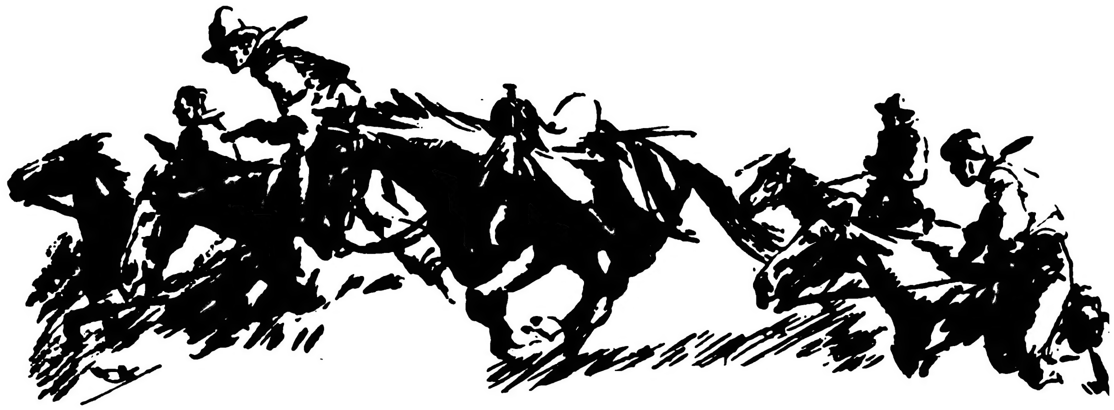
As for their passengers, they are of the world, good, bad and indifferent. They can be seen just as well in the streets, the movie theatres, the restaurants. The pair picked up at a presumably wicked night club are most likely a couple of youngsters who have been out dancing, and are in love, and have nowhere in the broad city to be alone for a few fleeting moments but the uncomfortable rear seat of a homeward bound taxi. The two quiet voiced, polite business men taken on at a Broadway corner may be a powerful gang leader and his gunman bodyguard.

Hacking in the big city is both interesting and tedious; it is easy to take up and it is exhausting; it affords a living and it is enslaving. The reverend gentleman, whatever his conclusions, has gained by the experience.

How do I know all this?

I know because during part of one highly colored year not altogether lost in the mists of distance I drove a taxi in New York myself. And I drove just a little while too long to be beguiled by the many romantic delusions that surround a clannish and hardboiled craft.

WILLIAM CORCORAN



# THE LIGHTS *of* TORAL

*By J. E. GRINSTEAD*

When the Texas Rangers Rode in a Grim and Gallant
Company to Exterminate the World's Worst Town.

* * *

## RIVER'S RISE

*By L. PATRICK GREENE*

A Tale of One Man's Incredible
Stand Against the Tide of German
Invasion in British South Africa.

## STRANGE CARGO

*By THOMAS KINGSTON*

A Romantic Tale of a Mysterious
Schooner and the Rebellion that
Reddened her Decks.

* * *

### *AND SEVEN SPLENDID SHORT STORIES*

Among them "Prairie Neighbors", by Elvira Pennell Roberts, a realistic tale
lonely men in a far off corner of the West; "Survival", by L. Murney Mintzer, a fi
little story of a submarine run amok; "Orders", by Ared White, a story of an Americ
soldier's grim devotion to duty; "Without Quarter", by H. M. Sutherland, a tale
Tennessee feud. And a long instalment of Captain Dingle's splendid novel of N
England whalermen, "Sea Worthy".